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Illustrated by ENGLE

Lower Than Angels

by ALGIS BUDRYS



*He came from outer space,
landed on a primitive
planet, and promptly became
a god to the natives. Which
was the last thing in the
universe he wanted!*

THIS was almost the end: Fred Imbry, standing tiredly at the jungle's edge, released the anchoring field. Streaming rain immediately began coming down on the parked sub-ship on the beach. The circle of sand formerly included in the field now began to splotch, and the sea dashed a wave against the landing jacks.

The frothing water ran up the beach and curled around Imbry's ankles. In a moment, the sand was as wet as though nothing had ever held that bit of seashore free.

The wind was still at storm force. Under the boiling gray sky, the craft shivered from half-buried landing jacks to needle-nosed prow. Soggy fronds plastered themselves against the hull with sharp, liquid, slaps.

Imbry trudged across the sand, slopping through the water, wiping rain out of his face. He opened the sub-ship's airlock hatch, and stopped, turning for one look back into the jungle.

His exhausted eyes were sunk deep into his face. He peered woodenly into the jungle's surging undergrowth. But there was no sign of anyone's having followed him; they'd let him go. Turning back, he hoisted himself aboard the ship and shut the hatch behind him. He opened the inside hatch and went through, leaving wet, sandy footprints across the deck.

He lay down in his piloting couch and began methodically checking off the board. When it showed green all around, he energized his starting engines, waited a bit, and moved his power switch to *Atmospheric*.

The earsplitting shriek of the jet throats beat back the crash of the sea and the keening of

the wind. The jungle trees jerked away from the explosion of billowing air, and even the sea recoiled. The ship danced, off the ground, and the landing jacks thumped up into their recesses. The sand poured out a shroud of towering steam.

The throttles advanced, and Imbry ascended into Heaven on a pillar of fire.

CHAPTER I

ALMOST at the beginning, a week earlier, Fred Imbry had been sitting in the *Sainte Marie's* briefing room for the first time in his life, having been aboard the mother ship a little less than two weeks. He sat there staring up at Lindenhoff, whose reputation had long ago made him one of Imbry's heroes, and hated the carefully schooled way the Assignment Officer could create the impression of a judgment and capacity he didn't have.

Around Imbry, the other contact crewmen were listening carefully, taking notes on their thigh pads as Lindenhoff's pointer rapped the schematic diagram of the solar system they'd just moved into. Part of Imbry's hatred was directed at them, too. Incompetents and cowards though most of them were, they still knew Lindenhoff for what he was. They'd all served under him for a long time. They'd all

THE STORIES of *Algis Budrys* are outstanding for—to name only one of his many talents—the way he makes thoughtful re-appraisals of time-worn science-fictional gimmicks. Other writers, for instance, have often used “translators” like the one in this story. But none of them has shown, as *Budrys* does, that such a device would not and could not allow people of differing cultures to understand each other immediately and completely. *Budrys*, in short, uses real science to make his stories exciting—not magic!

been exposed to his dramatics. They joked about them. But now they were sitting and listening for all the world as if *Lindenhoff* was what he pretended to be—the fearless, resourceful leader in command of the vast, idealistic enterprise that was embodied in the *Sainte Marie*. But then, the mother ship, too, and the corporation that owned her, were just as rotten at the core.

Lindenhoff was a bear of a man. He was dressed in iron-gray coveralls; squat, thick, powerful-looking, he moved back and forth on the raised platform under the schematic. With the harsh overhead lighting, his close-cropped skull looked almost bald; naked and strong, a turret set on the short, seamed pillar of his neck. A thick white scar began over his right eye, crushed down through the thick jut of his brow ridge, the mashed arch of his blunt nose, and ended on the staved-in cheekbone under his left eye. Except for the scar, his face was burned brown and leathery, and

even his lips were only a different shade of brown. The bright gold color of his eyebrows and the yellow straw of his lashes came close to glowing in contrast.

His voice was pitched deep. He talked in short, rumbled sentences. His thick arm jerked sharply each time he moved the pointer.

“Coogan, you’re going into IV. You’ve studied the aerial surveys. No animal life. No vegetation. All naked rock where it isn’t water. Take Petrick with you and do a mineralogical survey. You’ve got a week. If you hit anything promising, I’ll extend your schedule. Don’t go drawing any weapons. No more’n it takes to keep you happy, anyhow. Jusek’s going to need ‘em on VII.”

Imbry’s mouth twitched in disgust. The lighting. The platform on which *Lindenhoff* was shambling back and forth, never stumbling even when he stepped back without looking behind him. The dimensions of that

platform must be clearly imprinted in his mind. Every step was planned, every gesture practiced. The sunburn, laid down by a battery of lamps. The careful tailoring of the coveralls to make that ursine body look taller.

Coogan and Petrick. The coward and the secret drunkard. Petrick had left a partner to die on a plague world. Coogan had shot his way out of a screaming herd of reptiles on his third contact mission—and had never gone completely unarmed, anywhere, in the ten years since.

The rest of them were no better. Ogin had certified a planet worthless. A year later, a small scavenger company had found a fortune in wolfram not six miles away from his old campsite. Lindenhoff hadn't seen fit to fire him. Kenton, the foul-minded pathological liar. Maguire, who hated everything that walked or flew or crept, who ripped without pity at every world he contacted, and whose round face, with its boyish smile, was always broadcast along with a blushingly modest interview whenever the *Sainte Marie's* latest job of opening up a new solar system was covered by the news programs.

Most of those programs, Imbry'd found out in the short time he'd been aboard, were bought and paid for by the *Sainte Marie*

Development Corporation's public relations branch.

His thin hands curled up into tight knots.

THE mother ships and the men who worked out of them were the legends of this generation—with the *Sainte Marie* foremost among them. Constantly working outward, putting system after system inside the known universe, they were the bright hungry wave of mankind reaching out to gather in the stars. The men were the towering figures marching into the wilderness—the men who died unprotestingly in the thousand traps laid by the unknown darkness beyond the Edge; the men who beat their way through the jungles of the night, leaving broad roads behind them for civilization to follow.

He had come aboard this ship like a man fulfilling a dream—and found Coogan sitting in the crew lounge.

"Imbry, huh? Pull up a chair. My name's Coogan." He was whipcord lean; a wiry, broad-mouthed man with a tough, easy grin and live brown eyes. "TSN man?"

Imbry'd shaken his hand before he sat down. It felt a little unreal, actually meeting a man he'd heard so much about, and having him act as friendly as this.

"That's right," Imbry said, trying to sound as casual as he could under the circumstances. Except for Lindenhoff and possibly Maguire, Coogan was the man he most admired. "My enlistment finally ran out last week. I was a rescue specialist."

Coogan nodded. "We get some good boys that way." He grinned and chuckled. "So Old Smiley slipped you a trial contract and here you are, huh?"

"Old Smiley?"

"Personnel manager. Glad hand, looks sincere, got distinguished white hair."

"Oh. Mr. Redstone."

Coogan grinned. "Sure. Mr. Redstone. Well—think you'll like it here?"

Imbry nodded. "It looks like it," he said carefully. He realized he had to keep his enthusiasm ruthlessly under control, or else appear to be completely callow and juvenile. Even before he'd known what he'd do after he got out, he'd been counting the days until his TSN enlistment expired. Having the Corporation offer him a contract on the day of his discharge had been a tremendous unexpected bonus. If he'd been sixteen instead of twenty-six, he would have said it was the greatest thing that could have happened to him. Being twenty-six, he said, "I figure it's a good deal."

Coogan winked at him.

"You're not just kiddin', friend. We're on our way out to a system that looks pretty promising. Old Sainte Marie's in a position to declare another dividend if it pays off." He rubbed his thumb and forefinger together. "And how I do enjoy those dividends! Do a good job, lad. Do a bang-up job. Baby needs new shoes."

"I don't follow you."

"Hell, Buddy, I got half of my pay sunk into company stock. So do the rest of these guys. Couple years more, and I can get off this goddam barge and find me a steady woman, settle down, and just cash checks every quarter for the rest of my life. And laugh like a sonabitch every time I heard about you birds goin' out to earn me some more."

Imbry hadn't know what to make of it, at first. He'd mumbled an answer of some kind. But, listening to the other men talking—Petrick, with the alcohol puffing out on his breath; Kenton, making grandiose plans; Maguire, sneering coldly; Jusek, singlemindedly sharpening his bush knife—he'd gradually realized Coogan wasn't an exception in this crew of depraved, vicious fakes. Listening to them talk about the Corporation itself, he'd realized, too, that the "pioneers of civilization" line was something reserved for the bought-and-paid-for write-ups

only. He wasn't dewy-eyed. He didn't expect the Corporation to be in business for its health. But neither had he expected it to be totally cynical and grasping, completely indifferent to whether anyone ever settled the areas it skimmed of their first fruits.

He learned, in a shatteringly short time, just what the contact crew men thought of each other, of the Corporation, and of humanity. They carped at, gossiped about, and despised each other. They took the Corporation's stock as part of their pay, and exploited all the more ruthlessly for it. They jockeyed for favored assignments, brought back as "souvenirs" anything valuable and sufficiently portable on the worlds they visited, and cordially hated the crews of all the rival mother ships. They weren't pioneers—they were looters, squabbling among themselves for the biggest share, and they made Imbry's stomach turn.

They were even worse than most of the TSN officers and men he'd known.

"Imbry."

He looked up. Lindenhoff was standing, arms akimbo, under the schematic at the head of the briefing room.

"Yes?" Imbry answered tightly.

"You take II. It's a rainforest world. Humanoid inhabited."

"I've studied the surveys."

Lindenhoff's heavy mouth twitched. "I hope so. You're going alone. There's nothing the natives can do to you that you won't be able to handle. Conversely, there's nothing much of any value on the planet. You'll contact the natives and try to get them started on some kind of civilization. You'll explain what the Terran Union is, and the advantages of trade. They ought to be able to grow some luxury agricultural products. See how they'd respond toward developing a technology. If Coogan turns up some industrial ores on IV, they'd make a good market, in time. That's about the general idea. Nobody expects you to accomplish much—just push 'em in the right direction. Take two weeks. All straight?"

"Yes." Imbry felt his jaws tightening. Something for nothing, again. First the Corporation developed a market, then it sold it the ores it found on a neighboring world.

No, he wasn't angry about having been given an assignment that couldn't go wrong and that wouldn't matter much if it did. He was quite happy about it, because he intended to do as little for the Corporation as he could.

"All right, that's about it, boys," Lindenhoff finished up. He stepped off the platform and the lights above the schematic

went out. "You might as well draw your equipment and get started. The quicker it all gets done, the quicker we'll get paid."

COOGAN slapped him on the back as they walked out on the flight deck. "Remember what I said," he chuckled. "If there's any ambition in the gooks at all, shove it hard. Me, I'm going to be looking mighty hard for something to sell 'em."

"Yeah, sure!" Imbry snapped.

Coogan looked at him wide-eyed. "What's eating you, boy?"

Imbry took a deep breath. "You're eating me, Coogan. You and the rest of the set-up." He stopped and glared tensely at Coogan. "I signed a contract. I'll do what I'm obligated to. But I'm getting off this ship when I come back, and if I ever hear about you birds again, I'll spit on the sidewalk when I do."

Coogan reddened. He took a step forward, then caught himself and dropped his hands. He shook his head. "Imbry, I've been watching you go sour for the last week. All right, that's the breaks. Old Smiley made a mistake. It's not the first time—and you could have fooled me, too, at first. What's your gripe?"

"What d'you think it is? How about Lindenhoff's giving you Petrick for a partner?"

Coogan shook his head again, perplexed. "I don't follow you.

He's a geologist, isn't he?"

Imbry stared at him in astonishment. "You don't follow me?" Coogan was the one who'd told him about Petrick's drinking. He remembered the patronizing lift to Coogan's lip as he looked across the lounge at the white-faced, muddy-eyed man walking unsteadily through the room.

"Let's move along," Lindenhoff said from behind them.

Imbry half-turned. He looked down at the Assignment Officer in surprise. He hadn't heard the man coming. Neither had Coogan. Coogan nodded quickly.

"Just going, Lindy." Throwing another baffled glance at Imbry, he trotted across the deck toward his sub-ship, where Petrick was standing and waiting.

"Go on, son," Lindenhoff said. "You're holding up the show."

Imbry felt the knotted tension straining at his throat. He snatched up his pack.

"All right," he said harshly. He strode over to his ship, skirting out of the way of the little trucks that were humming back and forth around the ships, carrying supplies and maintenance crewmen. The flight deck echoed back to the clangs of slammed access hatches, the crash of a dropped wrench, and the soft whir of truck motors. Maintenance men were running back

and forth, completing final checks, and armorers struggled with the heavy belts of ammunition being loaded into the guns on Jusek's ship. In the harsh glare of work lights, Imbry climbed up through his hatch, slammed it shut, and got up into his control compartment.

The ship was a slightly converted model of the standard TSN carrier scout.

He fingered the controls distastefully. Grimacing, he jacked in his communication leads and contacted the tower for a check. Then he set up his flight plan in the ballistic computer, interlocked his AutoNav, and sat back, waiting.

Lindenhoff and his fearsome scar. Souvenir of danger on a frontier world? Badge of courage? Symbol of intrepidity?

Actually, he'd gotten it when a piece of scaffolding fell on him during a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, well before he ever came aboard the *Sainte Marie*.

The flight deck cleared. Imbry set his ship's circulators. The flight deck alarm blasted into life.

The deck canopy slid aside, and the flight deck's air billowed out into space. Imbry energized his main drive.

"Imbry clear for launch."

"Check, Imbry. Launch in ten."

He counted down, braced back against his couch. The catapult rammed him up off the deck, and he fired his engines. He rose high above the *Sainte Marie*, hovering, and then the ship nosed down and he trailed a wake of fire across the spangled night, in toward the foreign sun.

CHAPTER II

ALMOST from pole to pole, World II was the deep, lush color of rainforest vegetation. Only at the higher latitudes was it interspersed with the surging brown-green of prairie grass and bush country, tapering into something like a temperate ecology at the very "top" and "bottom" of the planet. Where there was no land, there was the deeper, bluer, green of the sea. And on the sea, again, the green of islands.

Imbry balanced his ship on end, drifting slowly down. He wanted a good look and a long look.

His training in the TSN had fitted him admirably for this job. Admirably enough so that he depended more on his own observation than he did on the aerial survey results, which had been fed raw into a computer and emerged as a digested judgment on the planet's ecology and population, and the probable

state and nature of its culture. The TSN applied this judgment from a military standpoint. The Corporation applied it to contact work. Imbry's experience had never known it to go far wrong. But he distrusted things mechanical, and so he hung in the sky for an hour or more, checking off promising-looking sites as they passed under him—and giving his bitterness and disillusion time to evaporate.

Down there was a race that had never heard of any people but itself; a race to which large portions of even its own planet must be unknown and enigmatic. A fairly happy race, probably. And if the Corporation found no significance in that, Imbry did. He was going to be their first touch with the incredible vastness in which they floated, and whatever he could do to smooth the shock and make their future easier, he meant to do, to the best of his ability. And if the Corporation had no feelings, he did. If there was no idealism aboard the *Sainte Marie*, there was some in him.

Finally, he picked an area on the eastern shore of the principal continent, and drifted down toward it, slipping in over the swelling expanse of an island-speckled ocean. Following the curve of a chain of atolls extending almost completely across the sea, he lost altitude

steadily, finding it possible, now, with some of the tension draining out of him, to enjoy the almost effortless drift through the quiet sky, and the quick responsiveness of his ship. It wasn't quite as he'd dreamed it, but it was good. The mother ship was far away, and here on this world he was alone, coming down just above the tops of the breakers, now, settling gently on a broad and gleaming beach.

THE anchoring field switched on, and bored down until it found bedrock. The sand around the ship pressed down in a shallow depression. Imbry turned away from the beach and began to walk into the jungle, his detectors and pressor fields tingling out to all sides of him. He walked slowly in the direction of a village, wearing his suit with its built-in equipment, with his helmet slung back between his shoulder blades.

The jungle was typical rain-forest. There were trees which met the climatic conditions, and therefore much resembled ordinary palms. The same was true of the thick undergrowth, and, from the sound of them, of the avian fauna. The chatter in the trees was not quite as harsh as the Terrestrial version, nor as shrill. From the little he'd seen, that seemed typical—a slightly more leisurely, slightly gentler

world than the Pacific belt of Earth. He walked slowly, as much from quiet enjoyment as from caution. Overhead, the sky was a warm blue, with soft clouds hanging over the atolls at the horizon. The jungle ran with bright color and deep, cool green. Imbry's face lost its drawn-up tension, and his walk became relaxed.

He found a trail in a very short time, and began following it, trusting to his detectors and not looking around except in simple curiosity. And quite soon after that, his detector field pinged, and the pressor pushed back against the right side of his chest. He turned it down, stopped, and looked in that direction. The field was set for sentient life only, and he knew he was about to meet his first native. He switched on his linguistic computer and waited.

The native, when he stepped out on the trail, was almost humanoid enough to pass for a Terrestrial. His ears were set a bit differently, and his musculature was not quite the same. It was also impossible to estimate his age, for none of the usual Terrestrial clues were applicable. But those were the only differences Imbry could see. His skin was dark enough so there was no mistaking him for a Caucasian—if you applied human standards—but a great deal

of that might be simple suntan. His hair was light brown, grew out of his scalp in an ordinary fashion, and had been cut. He was wearing a short, skirt-like garment, with a perfectly ordinary navel showing above it in a flat stomach. The pattern of his wraparound was of the blocky type to which woven cloth is limited, and it was bright, in imitation of the forms and colors available in the jungle.

He looked at Imbry silently, out of intelligent black eyes, with a tentative smile on his mouth. He was carrying nothing in his open hands, and he seemed neither upset nor timid.

Imbry had to wait until he spoke first. The computer had to have something to work with. Meanwhile, he smiled back. His TSN training had prepared him for situations exactly like this. In exercises, he'd duplicated this situation a dozen times, usually with ET's much more fearsome and much less human. So he merely smiled back, and there was no tension or misgiving in the atmosphere at all. There was only an odd, childlike shyness which, once broken, could only lead to an invitation to come over to the other fellow's house.

The native's smile broadened, and he raised one hand in greeting, breaking into soft, liquid speech that seemed to run on

and on without stopping, for many syllables at a time.

The native finished, and Imbry had to wait for his translator to make up its mind. Finally, it whispered in his ear.

"This is necessarily a rough computation. The communication is probably: 'Hello. Are you a god?' (That's an approximation. He means something between 'ancestor' and 'deity.') 'I'm very glad to meet you.' "

Imbry shook his head at the native, hoping this culture didn't take that to mean "yes." "No," he said to the computer, "I'm an explorer. And I'm glad to meet you." He continued to smile.

The computer hummed softly. "'Explorer' is inapplicable as yet," it told Imbry. It didn't have the vocabulary built up.

The native was looking curiously at the little box of the computer sitting on Imbry's shoulder. His jungle-trained ears were sharp, and he could obviously hear at least the sibilants as it whispered. His curiosity was friendly and intelligent; he seemed intrigued.

"All right, try: 'I'm like you. Hello,'" Imbry told the computer.

The translator spoke to the native. He looked at Imbry in gentle unbelief, and answered.

This time, it was easier. The translator sank its teeth into this

new material, and after a much shorter lag, without qualification, gave Imbry the native's communication, in its usual colloquial English, somewhat flavored:

"Obviously, you're not like me very much. But, we'll straighten that out later. Will you stay in my village for a while?"

Imbry nodded, to register the significance of the gesture. "I'd be glad to. My name's Imbry. What's yours?"

"Good. I'm Tylus. Will you walk with me? And who's the little ancestor on your shoulder?"

Imbry walked forward, and the native waited until they were a few feet apart and then began leading the way down the trail.

"That's not an ancestor," Imbry tried to explain. "It's a machine that changes your speech into mine and mine into yours." But the translator broke down completely at that. The best it could offer to do was to tell Tylus that it was a lever that talked. And "your speech" and "my speech" were concepts Tylus simply did not have.

In all conscience, Imbry had to cancel that, so he contented himself with saying it was not an ancestor. Tylus immediately asked which of Imbry's respected ancestors it would be if it *were* an ancestor, and it was obvious that the native regarded Imbry as being, in many respects, a charming liar. But it was also

plain that charming liars were accorded due respect in Tylus's culture, so the two were fairly well acquainted by the time they reached the outskirts of the village, and there was no longer any lag in translation at all.

THE VILLAGE was built to suit the environment. The roofs and walls of the light, one-room houses were made of woven frond mats tied down to a boxy frame. Every house had a porch for socializing with passersby, and a cookfire out front. Most of the houses faced in on a circular village square, with a big, communal cooking pit for special events, and the entire village was set in under the trees just a little away from the shoreline. There were several canoes on the sand above high water, and at some time this culture had developed the outrigger.

There was a large amount of shouting back and forth going on among the villagers, and a good-sized crowd had collected at the point where the trail opened out into the village clearing. But Tylus urged Imbry forward, passing proudly through the crowd, and Imbry went with him, feeling somewhat awkward about it, but not wanting to leave Tylus marching on alone. The villagers moved aside to let him through, smiling, some of them grinning at Tylus's straight

back and proudly carried head, none of them, obviously, wanting to deprive their compatriot of his moment.

Tylus stopped when he and Imbry reached the big central cooking pit, turned around, and struck a pose with one arm around Imbry's shoulders.

"Hey! Look! I've brought a big visitor!" Tylus shouted, grinning with pleasure.

The villagers let out a whoop of feigned surprise, laughing and shouting congratulations to Tylus, and cordial welcomes to Imbry.

"He *says* he's not a god!" Tylus climaxed, giving Imbry a broad, sidelong look of grinning appreciation for his ability to be ridiculous. "He came out of a big *lhoni* egg on the beach, and he's got a father-ghost who sits on his shoulder in a little black pot and gives him advice!"

"Oh, that's ingenious!" someone in the crowd commented in admiration.

"Look how fair he is!" one of the women exclaimed.

"Look how much handsomer than us he is!"

"Look how richly he's dressed! Look at the jewels shining in his silver belt!"

Imbry's translator raced to give him representative crowd comments, and he grinned back at the crowd. His rescue training had always presupposed grim,

hostile or at best noncommittal ET's that would have to be persuaded into helping him locate the crashed personnel of the stricken ship. Now, the first time he'd put it to actual use, he found reality giving theory a bland smile, and he sighed and relaxed completely. Once he'd disabused this village of its god-notions in connection with him, he'd be able to not only work but be friendly with these people. Not that they weren't already cordial.

He looked around at the crowd, both to observe it and to give everybody a look at his smile.

The crowd was composed, in nearly equal parts, of men and women very much like Tylus, with no significant variation except for age and sex characteristics that ranged from the appreciable to the only anthropologically interesting. In lesser part, there were children, most of them a little timid, some of them awestruck, all of them naked.

An older man, wearing a necklace of carved wood in addition to his wraparound, came forward through the crowd. Imbry had to guess at his age, but he thought he had it fairly accurately. The native had white hair, for one thing, and a slight thickness to his waist. For another, he was rather obviously

the village head man, and that indicated age, and the experience it brought with it.

The head man raised his arm in greeting, and Imbry replied.

"I am Iano. Will you stay with us in our village?"

Imbry nodded. "My name's Imbry. I'd like to stay here for a while."

Iano broke into a smile. "Fine! We're all very glad to meet you. I hope your journey can be interrupted for a long time." He smiled. "Well, if you say you're not a god, who do you say you are?" There was a ripple of chuckling through the crowd.

"I'm a man," Imbry answered. The translator had meanwhile worked out the proper wording for what he wanted to say next. "I'm an explorer from another country." The local word, of course, was not quite "explorer"—it was "traveler - from - other-places - for - the - enjoyment-of - it - and - to - see - what I - can - find."

Iano chuckled. Then, gravely, he asked: "Do you always travel in an *lhoni* egg, Imbry-who-says-he-is-Imbry?"

Imbry chuckled back in appreciation of Iano's shrewdness. He was enjoying this, even if it was becoming more and more difficult to approach the truth.

"That's no *lhoni* egg," he deprecated with a broad gesture

to match. "That's only my..." And here the translator had to give up and render the word as "canoe."

Iano nodded with a gravity so grave it was obviously no gravity at all. Tylus, standing to one side, gave Imbry a look of total admiration at this effort which overmatched all his others.

"Ah. Your canoe. And how does one balance a canoe shaped like an *Iboni* egg?"

Imbry realized what the translator had had to do. He'd been afraid of as much. He searched for the best answer, and the best answer seemed to be to tell the truth and stick to it. These people were intelligent. If he presented them with a consistent story, and backed it up with as much proof as he could muster, they'd eventually see that nothing so scrupulously self-consistent could possibly be anything but the truth.

"Well," he said slowly, wondering what the effect would be at first, "it's a canoe that doesn't sail on water. It sails in the sky."

There was a chorus of admiration through the crowd. As much of it seemed to be meant for Iano as for Imbry. They appeared to think Imbry had made a damaging admission in this contest.

Iano smiled. "Is your country in the sky?"

Imbry struggled for some way of making it understandable. "Yes and no," he said carefully. "It's necessary to travel through the sky to get to my country, but when you get there you're in a place that's very much like here, in some ways."

Iano smiled again. "Well, of course. How else would you be happy if there weren't places like this to live, in the sky?"

He turned toward the other villagers. "He *said* he wasn't a god," he declared quietly, his eyes twinkling.

There was a burst of chuckling, and now all the admiring glances were for Iano.

The head man turned back to Imbry. "Will you stay in my house for a while? We will produce a feast later in the day."

Imbry nodded gravely. "I'd be honored." The villagers were smiling at him gently as they drifted away, and Imbry got the feeling that they were being polite and telling him that his discomfort didn't really matter.

"Don't be sad," Tylus whispered. "Iano's a remarkably shrewd man. He could make anybody admit the truth. I'm quite sure that when he dies, he'll be some kind of god himself."

Then he waved a hand in temporary farewell and moved away, leaving Imbry alone with the gravely smiling Iano.

CHAPTER III

IMBRY sat on the porch with Iano. Both of them looked out over the village square, sitting side by side. It seemed to be the expected posture for conversation between a god and someone who was himself a likely candidate for a similar position, and it certainly made for ease of quiet contemplation before each new sentence was brought out into words.

Imbry was still wearing his suit. Iano had politely suggested that he might be warm in it, but Imbry had explained.

"It cools me. That's only one of the things it does. For one thing, if I took it off I wouldn't be able to talk to you. In my country we have different words."

Iano had thought about it for a moment. Then he said: "Your wraparound must have powerful ancestors living in it." He thought a moment more. "Am I right in supposing that this is a new attribute you're trying out, and it hasn't grown up enough to go about without advice?"

Imbry'd been glad of several minutes in which to think. Then he'd tried to explain.

"No," he said, "the suit (perforce, the word was 'wrap-around - for - the - whole-body') "was made—was built—

by other men in my country. It was built to protect me, and to make me able to travel anywhere without being in any danger." But that was only just as much as repeating Iano's theory back to him in different form, and he realized it after Iano's polite silence had extended too long to be anything but an answer in itself.

He tried to explain the concept "machine."

"I'll teach you a new word for a new thing," he said. Iano nodded attentively.

Imbry switched off the translator, making sure Iano saw the motion and understood the result. Then he repeated "machine" several times, and, once Iano had accustomed himself to Imbry's new voice, which up to now he'd only heard as an indistinct background murmur to the translator's speaker, the head man picked it up quickly.

"Mahschin," he said at last, and Imbry switched his translator back on. "Go on, Imbry."

"A machine is a number of levers, working together. It is built by perfectly ordinary artisans—not gods, Iano, but men like yourself and myself—who have a good deal of knowledge and skill. With one lever, you can raise a tree trunk. With many levers, shaped into paddles, men can push the tree trunk through the water, after they

have shaped it into a canoe.

"So a machine is like the many levers that move the canoe. But usually it doesn't need men to push it. It goes on by itself, because it—"

Here he had to stop for a minute. These people had no concept of storing energy and then releasing it to provide motive power. Iano waited, patient and polite.

"It has a little bit of fire in it," Imbry was forced to say lamely. "Fire can be put in a box—in something like two pots fastened tightly on top of each other—so that it can't get out. But it wants to get out—it pushes against the inside of the two pots—so if you make a hole in the pots and put a lever in the way, the fire rushing out pushes the lever."

He looked at Iano, but couldn't make out whether he was being believed or not. Half the time, he had no idea what kind of almost-but-sadly-not-quite concepts the translator might be substituting for the things he was saying.

"A machine can be built to do almost anything that would otherwise require a lot of men. For instance, I could have brought another man with me who was skilled at learning words that weren't his. Then I wouldn't need the little black pot, which is a machine that

learns words that aren't the same as mine. But the machine does it faster, and in some ways, better."

He stopped, hoping Iano had understood at least part of it.

After a time, Iano nodded gravely. "That's very ingenious. It saves your ancestors the inconvenience of coming with you and fatiguing themselves. I had no idea such a thing could be done. But of course, in your country there are different kinds of fires than we have here."

Which was a perfectly sound description, Imbry had to admit, granting Iano's viewpoint.

So NOW they'd been sitting quietly for a number of minutes, and Imbry had begun to realize that he might have to work for a long time before he extricated himself from this embarrassment. Finally he said, "Well, if you think I'm a god, what kind of a god do you think I am?"

Iano answered slowly. "Well, to tell you the truth, I don't know. You might be an ancestor. Or you might be only a man who has made friends with a lot of his ancestors." Imbry felt a flash of hope, but Iano went on: "Which, of course, would make you a god. Or—" He paused, and Imbry, taking a side-ward look, caught Iano looking at him cautiously. "Or you



might be no ancestor and no man-god. You might be one of the very-real-gods. You might be the cloud god, or the jungle god, taking the attribute of a man. Or . . . you might be *the* god. You might be the-father-of-all-*lhoni*."

Imbry took a deep breath. "Would you describe the *lhoni* to me, please," he said.

"Certainly." Iano's voice and manner were still cautious. "The *lhoni* are animals which live in the sea or on the beaches, as they choose. They leave their eggs on the beaches, but they rear their young in the sea. They

are fishers, and they are very wise. Many of them are ancestors." He said it with unusual respect and reverence.

Imbry sat quietly again. The god who was the-father-of-all-the-*lhoni* would not only be the father of many ancestors, who were themselves minor gods, he would also control the sea, everything pertaining to the sea, the beaches, probably all the islands, and the fates of those whose lives were tied to the sea, who were themselves fishers, like the villagers. Imbry wondered how much geography the villagers knew. They might con-

sider that the land was always surrounded by ocean—that, as a matter of fact, the universe consisted of ocean encircling a relatively small bit of land.

If Iano thought that was who Imbry might be, then he might very well be thinking that he was in the presence of the greatest god there was. A typical god, of course—there wasn't a god in the world who didn't enjoy a joke, a feast, and a good untruth - for - the - fun - of - everybody at least as much as anybody else—but still, though you might not expect too much of the household lares and penates, when it came to Jupiter himself . . .

Imbry couldn't let that go on. Almost anything might happen. He might leave a religion behind him that, in a few generations of distortion, might twist itself—and the entire culture—into something monstrous. He might leave the way open for the next Corporation man to practice a brand of exploitation that would be near to unimaginable.

Imbry remembered what the *conquistadores* had done in Central and South America, and his hackles rose.

"No!" he exploded violently, and Iano recoiled a little, startled. "No, I'm not a god. Not any kind. I'm a man—a different kind of man, maybe, but just

a man. The fact that I have a few machines doesn't prove anything. The fact that I know more about some things than you do doesn't prove anything. I come from a country where the people can keep records, so nothing's lost when a man who has some wisdom dies. I've been taught out of those records, and I'm helped by machines built by other men who study other records. But you think my people are any better than yours? You think the men I have to work with are good, or brave, or kind? No more than you. Less. We kill each other, we take away from other people what isn't ours, we lie—we tell untruths—for-unfair-advantage—we leave bad where we found good—we're just men, we're not anything like gods, and we never will be!"

Iano had recovered his composure quickly. He nodded.

"No doubt," he said. "No doubt, to one god other gods are much like other men are to a man. Possibly even gods have gods. But that is not for us to say. We are men *here*, not in the country of the gods. There is the jungle, the sky, and the sea. And those who know more places than that must be our gods." He looked at Imbry with quick sympathy. "It's sad to know that even a god must be troubled."

CHAPTER IV

THE ODDS were low that any of the food served at the feast could hurt him. Aside from the fact that the ecology was closely parallel to Earth's, Imbry's system was flooded with Antinfect from the precautionary shot he'd gotten aboard the mother ship. But he couldn't afford to take the chance of getting sick. It might help destroy the legend gathered around him, but it would also leave him helpless. He had too much to do in too short a time to risk that. So he politely faked touching his tongue to each of the dishes as it was passed to him, and settled for a supper of rations out of his suit, grimacing as he heard someone whisper behind him that the god had brought his own god-food with him because the food of men could not nourish him in this attribute.

No matter what he did, he couldn't shake the faith of the villagers. It was obvious at a glance that he was a god; therefore, ipso facto, everything he did was god-like.

He sat beside Iano and his wives, watching the fire roar in the communal pit and listening to the pounding beat of the musicians, but, even though the villagers were laughing happily and enjoying themselves im-

mensely, he could not recapture the mood of easy relaxation he had borrowed from them and their world this afternoon. The *Sainte Marie* pressed too close to him. When he left here, he'd never be able to come back—and a ravaged world would haunt him for the rest of his life.

"Hey! Imbry! Look what I've got to show you!"

He looked up, and there was Tylus, coming toward him hand-in-hand with a quietly beautiful girl, and holding a baby just into the toddling stage. The child was being half-led, half-dragged, and seemed to be enjoying it.

Imbry smiled broadly. There was no getting away from it. Tylus enjoyed life so hugely that nobody near him could quite escape the infection.

"This is my woman, Pia," Tylus said with a proud grin, and the girl smiled shyly. "And this one hasn't got his name yet." He reached down and slapped the baby playfully, and the boy grinned from ear to ear.

Everyone around the fire chuckled. Imbry grinned despite himself, and nodded gravely to Tylus. "I'm glad to meet them." He smiled at Pia. "She must have been blind to pick you when she could have had so much better." The girl blushed, and everyone burst into laughter, while Tylus postured in

proud glee. Imbry nodded toward the boy. "If he didn't look so much like his father, I'd say he was a fine one."

There was fresh laughter, and Imbry joined in it because he almost desperately needed to; but after it trailed away and Tylus and his family were gone back into their hut, after the fire died and the feast was over, when Imbry lay on the mat in Iano's house and the wind clashed the tree fronds while the surf washed against the beach—then Imbry lay tightly awake.

GIVEN time—given a year or two—he might be able to break down the villagers' idea about him. But he doubted it. Iano was right. Even if he threw away his suit and left himself with no more equipment than any of the villagers possessed, he knew too much. Earth and the Terran Union were his heritage, and that was enough to make a god of any man among these people. If he so much as introduced the wheel into this culture, he was doing something none of these people had conceived of in all their history.

And he had nothing like a year. In two weeks' time, even using eidetic techniques, he could barely build up enough of a vocabulary in their language to do without his translator for simpler conversations. And,

again, it wouldn't make a particle of difference whether he spoke their language or not. Words would never convince them.

But he had to get through to them somehow.

The cold fact was that during a half day's talk, he hadn't gotten anyone in the village to take literally even the slightest thing he said. He was a god. Gods speak in allegories, or gods proclaim laws. Gods do not speak man-to-man. And if they do, rest assured it is part of some divine plan, designed to meet inscrutable ends by subtle means.

What was it Lindenhoff had told him?

"You'll contact the natives and try to get them started on some kind of civilization. You'll explain what the Terran Union is, and the advantages of trade. See how they'd respond toward developing a technology."

It couldn't be done. Not by a god who might, at worst, be only a demi-god, who might at best even be *the* god, and who could not, under any circumstances, possibly be considered on a par with the other travelers-for-pleasure who occasionally turned up from over the sea but who were manifestly only other men.

He wasn't supposed to be a stern god, or an omnipotent god, or a being above the flesh. That

kind of deity took a monotheist to appreciate him. He was simply supposed to be a god of these people—vain and happily boastful at times, a liar at times, a glutton at times, a drunkard at times, timid at times, adventurous at times, a hero at times, and heir to other sins of the flesh at other times, but always powerful, always above the people in wisdom of his own kind, always a god: always a mute with a whispering ancestor on his shoulder.

But if he left them now, they'd be lost. Someone else would come down, and be a god, Kenton, or Ogin, or Maguire the killer. And when the new god realized the situation, he'd stop trying to make these people into at least some kind of rudimentary market. They wouldn't even have that value to turn them into an interest to be protected. Lindenhoff would think of something else to do with them, for the Corporation's good. Turn them into a labor force for the mines Coogan would be opening up on IV, perhaps. Or else enslave them here. Have the god nudge them into becoming farmers for the luxury market, or introduce a technology whether they understood it or not.

That might work. If the god and his fellow gods found stones for them to dig and smelt into metal, and showed them how to

make machines, they might do it.

To please the god by following his advice. Not because they understood or wanted machines—or needed them—but to fulfill the god's inscrutable plan. They'd sicken with the bewilderment in their hearts, and lose their smiles in the smelter's heat. The canoes would rot on the beaches, and the fishing spears would break. The houses would crumble on the ocean's edge until the sea reached up and swept the village clean, and the *Iboni* eggs would hatch out in the warming sun. The village would be gone, and its people slaving far away, lonesome for their ancestors.

He had to do it. Somehow, within these two weeks, he had to give them a chance of some kind.

It would be his last chance, too. Twenty-six years of life, and all of it blunted. He was failing here, with the taste of the Corporation bitter in his mouth. He'd found nothing in the TSN but brutal officers and cynical men waiting for a war to start somewhere, so the promotions and bonuses would come, and meanwhile making the best they could out of what police actions and minor skirmishes there were with weak alien races. Before that, school, and a thousand time-markers and campus wheels

for everyone who thought that some day, if he was good enough, he'd have something to contribute to Mankind.

The god had to prove to be human after all. And the human could talk to these other men, as just another man, and then perhaps they might advance of themselves to the point where they could begin a civilization that was part of them, and part of some plan of theirs, instead of some god's. And someday these people, too, would land their metal canoes on some foreign beach under a foreign sun.

He had to destroy himself. He had to tear down his own façade.

Just before he fell into his fitful sleep, he made his decision. At the first opportunity to be of help in some way they would consider more than man-like, he'd fail. The legend would crumble, and he could be a man.

He fell asleep, tense and perspiring, and the stars hung over the world, with the mother ship among them.

CHAPTER V

THE CHANCE came. He couldn't take it.

Two days had gone by, and nothing had happened to change the situation. He spent two empty days talking to Iano and as many other villagers as he

could, and the only knowledge they gained was an insight into the ways of gods, who proved, after all, to be very much like men, on their own grander scale. One or two were plainly saddened by his obvious concern over something they, being unfortunately only men, could not quite grasp. Iano caught something of his mood, and was upset by it until his face fell into a puzzled, concerned look that was strange to it. But it only left him and Imbry further apart. There was no bridge between them.

On the third day, the sea was flat and oily, and the air lay dankly still across the village. The tree fronds hung down limply, and the clouds thickened gradually during the night, so that Imbry woke up to the first sunless day he'd seen. He got up as quietly as he could, and left Iano's house, walking slowly across the compound toward the sea. He stood on the beach, looking out across the glassy swells, thinking back to the first hour in which he'd hung above that ocean and slowly come down with the anticipation burning out the disgust in him.

He threw a shell as far out into the water as he could, and watched it skip once, skip twice, teeter in the air, and knife into the water without a splash. Then he turned around and walked slowly back into the village,

where one or two women were beginning to light their cookfires.

He greeted them listlessly, and they answered gravely, their easy smiles dying. He wandered over toward Tylus's house. And heard Pia crying.

"Hello!"

Tylus came out of the house, and for the first time Imbry saw him looking strained, his lips white at the corners. "Hello, Imbry," he said in a tired voice.

"What's wrong, Tylus?"

Tylus shrugged. "The baby's going to die."

Imbry stared up at him. "Why?"

"He cut his foot yesterday morning. I put a poultice on it. It didn't help. His foot's red today, and it hurts him to touch it. It happens."

"Oh, no, it doesn't. Not any more. Let me look at him." Imbry came up the short ladder to Tylus's porch. "It can't be anything I can't handle."

He knew the villagers' attitude toward death. Culturally, death was the natural result of growing old, of being born weak, and, sometimes, of having a child. Sometimes, too, a healthy person could suddenly get a pain in the belly, lie in agony for a day, and then die. Culturally, it usually made the victim an ancestor, and grief for more than a short time was something the

villagers were too full of living to indulge in. But sometimes it was harder to take; in this tropical climate, a moderately bad cut could infect like wildfire, and then someone died who didn't seem to have been ready for it.

Tylus's eyes lit up for a moment. Then they became gravely steady.

"You don't have to, if you don't want to, Imbry. Suppose some other god wants him? Suppose his ancestors object to your stepping in? And—and besides—" Tylus dropped his eyes. "I don't know. Maybe you're not a god."

Imbry couldn't stop to argue. "I'd like to look at him anyway. No matter what might happen."

The hopelessness drained out of Tylus's face. He touched Imbry's arm. "Come into my house," he said, repeating the social formula gratefully. "Pia! Imbry's here to make the baby well!"

IMBRY strode into the house, pulling his medkit out of his suit. Pia turned away from the baby's mat, raising her drawn face. Then she jumped up and went to stand next to Tylus, clenching his hand.

The baby was moving his arms feverishly, and his cheeks were flushed. But he'd learned, through the night, not to move the bandaged foot.

Imbry cut the scrap of cloth away with his bandage shears, wincing at the puffy, white-lipped gash. He snapped the pencil light out of its clip and took a good look into the wound.

It was dirty as sin, packed with some kind of herb mixture that was hopelessly embedded in the tissues. Cleaning it thoroughly was out of the question. Cursing softly, he did the best he could, not daring to try the anesthetic syrette in the kit. He had no idea of what even a human child's dose might be.

He had to leave a lot of the poultice in the wound. Working as fast as he could, he spilled an envelope of antibiotics over the gash, slapped on a fresh bandage, and then stood up. Antipyretics were out. The boy'd have to have his fever. There was one gamble he had to take, but he was damned if he'd take any more. He held up the ampule of Antinfect.

"Universal Antitoxin" was etched into the glass. Well, it had better be.

He broke the seal and stabbed the tip of his hyposprayer through the diaphragm. He retracted carefully. It was a three cc ampule. About half of it ought to do. He watched the dial on the sprayer with fierce concentration, inching the knob around until it read "1.5," and yanking the tip out.

Muttering a prayer, he fired the Antinfect into the boy's leg. Then he sighed, re-packed his kit, and turned around.

"If I haven't killed him, he'll be all right." He gestured down at the bandage. "There's going to be a lot of stuff coming out of that wound. Let it come. Don't touch the bandage. I'll take another look at it in a few hours. Meanwhile, let me know right away if he looks like he's getting worse." He smiled harshly. "And let me know if he's getting better, too."

Pia was looking at him with an awestruck expression on her face. Tylus's glance clung to the medkit and then traveled up to Imbry's eyes.

"You are a god," he said in a whisper. "You are more than a god. You are the god of all other gods."

"I know," Imbry growled. "For good and all now, even if the boy dies. I'm a god now no matter what I do." He strode out of the house and out across the village square, walking in short, vicious strides along the beach until he was out of sight of the village. He stood for a long time, looking out across the gray sea. And then, with a crooked twist to his lips and a beaten hopelessness in his eyes, he walked back into the village because there was nothing else he could do.

LORD KNEW where the hurricane had been born. Somewhere down the chain of islands—or past them—the mass of air had begun to whirl. Born out of the ocean, it spun over the water for hundreds of miles, marching toward the coast.

The surf below the village sprang into life. It lashed along the strand in frothing, growling columns, and the *Ihoni* eggs washed out of their nests and rolled far down the slope of the beach before the waves picked them up again and crushed them against the stones and shells.

The trees tore the edges of their fronds against each other, and the broken ends flew away on the wind. The birds in the jungle began to huddle tightly into themselves.

"Your canoe," Iano said to Imbry as they stood in front of the head man's house.

Imbry shook his head. "It'll stand."

He watched the families taking their few essential belongings out of their houses and storing them inside the overturned canoes that had been brought high inland early in the afternoon.

"What about this storm? Is it liable to be bad?"

Iano shook his head noncommittally. "There're two or three bad ones every season."

Imbry grunted and looked out

over the village square. Even if the storm mashed the houses flat, they'd be up again two days afterward. The sea and the jungle gave food, and the fronded trees gave shelter. He saw no reason why these people wanted gods in the first place.

He saw a commotion at the door of Tylus's house. Tylus and Pia stood in the doorway. Pia was holding the baby.

"Look! Hey! Look!" Tylus shouted. The other villagers turned, surprised.

"Hey! Come look at my baby! Come look at the boy Imbry made well!" But Tylus himself didn't follow his own advice. As the other villagers came running, forgetting the possessions piled beside the canoes, he broke through them and ran across the square to Imbry and Iano.

"He's fine! He stopped crying! His leg isn't hot any more, and we can touch it without hurting him!" Tylus shouted, looking up at Imbry.

Imbry didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He smiled with an agonized twist of his mouth. "I thought I told you not to touch that foot."

"But he's *fine*, Imbry! He's even laughing!" Tylus was gesturing joyfully. "Imbry—"

"Yes?"

"Imbry, I want a gift."

"A gift?"

"Yes. I want you to give him

your name. When his naming day comes, I want him to call himself The Beloved of Imbry."

My God, Imbry thought, I've done it! I've saddled them with the legend of myself. He looked down at Tylus. "Are you sure?" he asked, feeling the words come out of his tight throat.

"I would like it very much," Tylus answered with sudden quietness.

And there was nothing Imbry could say but, "All right. When his naming day comes, if you still want to."

Tylus nodded. Then, obviously, he realized he'd run out of things to say and do. With Imbry the ancestor, or Imbry the man - with - many - powerful - ancestors; with Imbry the demi-god, he could have found something else to talk about. But this was Imbry, the god of all gods, and that was different.

"Well . . . I have to be with Pia. Thank you." He threw Imbry one more grateful smile, and trotted back across the square, to where the other villagers were clustered around Pia, talking excitedly and often looking with shy smiles in Imbry's direction.

It was growing rapidly darker. Night was coming, and the hurricane was trudging westward with it. Imbry looked at Iano, with his wraparound plastered against his body by the force of the wind and his face

in the darkness under the overhanging porch roof.

"What'll you do when the storm comes?" Imbry asked.

Iano gestured indefinitely. "Nothing, if it's a little one. If it's bad, we'll get close to the trees, on the side away from the wind."

"Do you think it looks like it'll get bad?"

Iano gestured in the same way. "Who knows?" he said, looking at Imbry.

Imbry looked at him steadily. "I'm only a man. I can't make it better or worse. I can't tell you what it's going to be. I'm only a man, no matter what Tylus and Pia think."

Iano gestured again. "There are men. I know that much because I am a man. There may be other men, who are our ancestors and our gods, who in their turn have gods. And those gods may have greater gods. But I am a man, and I know what I see and what I am. Later, after I die and am an ancestor, I may know other men like myself, and call them men. But these people who are not yet ancestors—" He swept his arm in a gesture that encircled the village. "—these people will call me a god, if I choose to visit them.

"To Tylus and Pia—and to many others—you are the god of all gods. To myself . . . I don't know. Perhaps I am too

near to being an ancestor not to think there may be other gods above you. But," he finished, "they are not my gods. They are yours. And to me you are more than a man."

THE HURRICANE came with the night, and the sea was coldly phosphorescent as it battered at the shore. The wind screamed invisibly at the trees. The village square was scoured clean of sand and stones, and the houses were groaning.

The villagers sat on the ground, resting their backs against the thrashing trees.

Imbry couldn't accustom himself to the constant sway. He stood motionless beside the tree that sheltered Iano, using his pressors to brace himself. He knew the villagers were looking at him through the darkness, taking it as one more proof of what he was, but that made no difference any longer. He faced into the storm, feeling the cold sting of the wind.

Lindenhoff would be overjoyed. And Maguire would grin coldly. Coogan would count his money, and Petrick would drink a solitary toast to the helpless suckers he could make do anything he wanted.

And Imbry? He let the cold spray dash against his face and didn't bother to wipe it off. Imbry was ready to quit.

The universe was made the way it was, and there was no changing it, whether to suit his ideas of what men should be or not. The legendary heroes of the human race—the brave, the brilliant, selfless men who broke the constant trail for the rest of Mankind to follow—must have been a very different breed from what the stories said they were.

A house crashed over on the far side of the village, and crunched apart. He heard a woman moan in brief fear, but then her man must have quieted her, for there was no further sound from any of the dim figures huddled against the trees around him.

The storm rose higher. For a half hour, Imbry listened to the houses tearing down, and felt the spray in his face thicken until it was like rain. The phosphorescent wall of surf crept higher on the beach, until he could see it plainly; a tumbling, ghostly mass in among the trees nearest the beach. The wind became a solid wall, and he turned up the intensity on his pressors. He had no way of knowing whether the villagers were making any sound or not.

He felt a tug at his leg, and bent down, turning off his pressors. Iano was looking up at him, his face distorted by the wind, his hair standing away from one side of his head. Im-

bry closed one arm around the tree.

"What?" Imbry bellowed into the translator, and the translator tried to bellow into Ianos's ear.

"It . . . very . . . very bad . . . very . . . rain . . . no rain . . ."

The translator struggled to get the message through to Imbry, but the wind tore it to tatters.

"Yes, it's bad," Imbry shouted. "What was that about rain?"

"Imbry . . . when . . . rain . . ."

Clearly and distinctly, he heard a woman scream. There was a second's death for the wind. And then the rain and the sea came in among the trees together.

White, furious water tore at his legs and pushed around his waist. He gagged on salt. Coughing and choking, he tried to see what was happening to the villagers.

But he was cut off in a furious, pounding, sluicing mass of water pouring out of the sky at last, blind and isolated as he tried to find air to breath. He felt it washing into his suit, filling its legs, weighing his feet down. He closed his helmet in a panic, spilling its water down over his head, and as he snapped it tight another wave raced through the trees to break far inland, and he lost his footing.

He tumbled over and over in the churning water, fumbling for his pressor controls. Finally

he got to them, and snapped erect, with the field on full. The water broke against his faceplate, flew away, and he was left standing in a bubble of emptiness that exactly outlined the field. Sea water walled it from the ground to the height of his face, and the rain roofed it from above.

Blind inside his bubble, he waited for the morning.

HE AWOKE to a dim light filtering through to him, and he looked up to see layer after layer of debris piled atop his bubble. It was still raining, but the solid cloudburst was over. There was still water on the ground, but it was only a few inches deep. He collapsed his field, and the pulped sticks and chips of wood fell in a shower on him. He threw back his helmet and looked around.

The water had carried him into the jungle at the extreme edge of the clearing where the village had stood, and from where he was he could see out to the heaving ocean.

The trees were splintered and bent. They lay across the clearing, pinning down a few slight bits of wreckage. But almost all traces of the village were gone. Where the canocs with their household possessions had lain in an anchored row, there was nothing left.

Only a small knot of villagers stood in the clearing. Imbry tried to count them; tried to compare them to the size of the crowd that had welcomed him into the village, and stopped. He came slowly forward, and the villagers shrank back. Iano stepped out to meet him, and, slowly, Tylus.

"Iano, I'm sorry," Imbry said in a dull voice, looking around the ravaged clearing again. If he'd had any idea the hurricane could possibly be that bad, he would have called the mother ship for help. Lindenhoff would have fired into the storm and disrupted it, to save his potential slaves.

"Why did this happen, Imbry?" Iano demanded. "Why was this done to us?"

Imbry shook his head. "I don't know. A storm— Nobody can blame anything."

Iano clenched his fists.

"I did not ask during the whole day beforehand, though I knew what would happen. I did not even ask in the beginning of the storm. But when I knew the rain must come; when the sea growled and the wind stopped, *then*, at last, I asked you to make the storm die. Imbry, you did nothing. You made yourself safe, and you did nothing. *Why was this done?*"

Iano's torso quivered with bunched muscles. His eyes

blazed. "If you were who we believed you to be, if you made Tylus's boy well, why did you do this? *Why did you send the storm?*"

It was the final irony: apparently, if Iano had accepted Imbry as a man, he would have told him in advance how bad the storm was likely to be. . . .

Imbry shook his head. "I'm not a god, Iano," he repeated dully. He looked at Tylus, who was standing pale and bitter-eyed behind Iano.

"Are they safe, Tylus?"

Tylus looked silently over Imbry's shoulder, and Imbry turned his head to follow his glance. He saw the paler shape crushed around the trunk of a tree, one arm still gripping the boy.

"I must make a canoe," Tylus said in a dead voice. "I'll go on a long journey-to-leave-the-sadness-behind. I'll go where there aren't any gods like you."

"Tylus!"

But Iano clutched Imbry's arm, and he had to turn back toward the head man.

"We'll all have to go. We can't ever stay here again." The grip tightened on Imbry's arm, and the suit automatically pressed it off. Iano jerked his arm away.

"The storm came because of you. It came to teach us something. We have learned it."

Iano stepped back. "You're not a great god. You tricked us. You're a bad ancestor—you're sick—you have the touch of death in your hand."

"I never said I was a god." Imbry's voice was unsteady. "I told you I was only a man."

Tylus looked at him out of his dead eyes. "How can you possibly be a man like us? If you're not a god, then you're a demon."

Imbry's face twisted. "You wouldn't listen to me. It's not my fault you expected something I couldn't deliver. Is it my fault you couldn't let me be what I am?"

"We know what you are," Tylus said.

There wasn't anything Imbry could tell him. He slowly turned away from the two natives and began the long walk back to the sub-ship.

HE FINISHED checking the board and energized his starting motors. He waited for a minute, and threw in his atmospheric drive.

The rumble of jet throats shook through the hull, and throbbed in the control compartment. The ship broke free, and he retracted the landing jacks.

The throttles advanced, and Imbry fled into the stars.

He sat motionless for several minutes. The memory of Tylus's

lifeless voice etched itself into the set of his jaw and the backs of his eyes. It seemed impossible that it wouldn't be there forever.

There was another thing to do. He clicked on his communicator.

"This is Imbry. Get me Lindenhoff."

"Check, Imbry. Stand by."

He lay in the piloting couch, waiting, and when the image of Lindenhoff's face built up on the screen, he couldn't quite meet its eyes.

"Yeah, Imbry?"

He forced himself to look directly into the screen. "I'm on my way in, Lindenhoff. I ran into a problem. I'm dictating a full report for the files, but I wanted to tell you first—and I think I've got the answer."

Lindenhoff grinned slowly. "Okay, Fred."

LINDENHOFF was waiting for him as he berthed the sub-ship aboard the *Sainte Marie*. Imbry climbed out and looked quietly at the man.

Lindenhoff chuckled. "You look exactly like one of our real veterans," he said. "A hot bath and a good meal'll take care of that." He chuckled again. "It will, too—it takes more than once around the track before this business starts getting you."

"So you figure I'll be staying

on," Imbry said, feeling tired and older than he ever had in his life. "How do you know I didn't make a real mess of it, down there?"

Lindenhoff chuckled. "You made it back in one piece, didn't you? That's the criterion, Fred. I hate to say so, but it is. No mess can possibly be irretrievable if it doesn't kill the man who made it. Besides—you don't know enough to tell whether you made any mistakes or not."

Imbry grunted, thinking Lindenhoff couldn't possibly know how much of an idiot he felt like, and how much he had on his conscience.

"Well, let's get to this report of yours," Lindenhoff said.

Imbry nodded slowly. They walked off the *Sainte Marie's* flight deck into the labyrinth of steel decks below.

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS three seasons after the storm, and Tylus was still on his journey. One day he came to a new island and ran his canoe up on the beach. Perhaps here he wouldn't find Pia and the nameless boy waiting for him in the palm groves.

He walked up the sand, and triggered the alarm without knowing it.

Aboard the mother ship, Imbry heard it go off and switched

the tight-beam scanner on. The intercom speaker over his head broke into a crackle.

"Fred? You got that one?"

"Uh-huh, Lindy. Right here."

"Which set-up is it?"

"88 on the B grid. It's that atoll right in the middle of the prevailing wind belt."

"I've got to hand it to you, Fred. Those little traps of yours are working like a charm."

Imbry ran his hand over his face. He knew what was going to happen to that innocent native, whoever he was. He'd come out of it a man, ready to take on the job of helping his people climb upward, with a lot of his old ideas stripped away.

Imbry's mouth jerked sideways, in the habitual gesture that was etching a deep groove in the skin of his face.

But he wouldn't be happy while he was learning. It was good for him—but there was no way for him to know that until he'd learned.

"How many this time?" Lindenhoff asked. "Coogan tells me they could use a lot of new recruits in a hurry, in that city they're building up north."

"Just one canoe," Imbry said, looking at the image on the scanner. "Small one, at that. Afraid it's only one man, Lindy." He moved the picture a little. "Yeah. Just one." He focussed the controls.

"It's him! Tylus! We've got Tylus!"

There was a short pause on the other end of the intercom circuit. Then Lindenhoff said: "Okay, okay. You've finally got your pet one. Now, don't muff things in the rush." He chuckled softly and switched off.

Imbry bent closer to the scanner, though there was no real necessity for it. From here on, the process was automatic, and as inevitable as an avalanche.

Lindenhoff had said it, that time last year when Imbry'd come back up from the planet: "Fred, there's a price to be paid for everything you learn about what's in the universe. It has to hurt, or it isn't a real price. There aren't any easy answers."

Certainly, for any man who had to learn this particular answer, the price could go very high. It was, in essence, the same answer Imbry himself had learned. When he had joined the Corporation, he had expected Lindenhoff, Coogan and the others to be gods—of a sort. And of course they weren't, any more than Imbry was. They were human, and had to do their job in human ways.

He had confused motive and method. Actually, the Corporation's motives were not so different from his, even though they were stated realistically instead of idealistically. To look

at it another way, the Corporation simply had a clearer—more sane—knowledge of what it was doing, and why.

Imbry, finding himself considered a god by the natives, had realized his own gods were only men, after all. What better way, then, to get the same natives started on the road to true civilization than to put them in exactly the same position he had been in?

Imbry watched the protoplasmic robots on the island come hesitantly through the underbrush toward the beach.

On the island, Tylus stopped. There was a crackle in the shrubbery, and a small, diffident figure stepped out. Its expression was watchful, but friendly. It looked rather much like a man, except for its small size and the shade of its skin. Its eyes were intelligent. It looked trustful.

"Hello," Tylus said. "I'm Tylus."

The little native came forward. Others followed it, some more timid than the first, some smiling cordially. They kept casting glances at the magic tree-pod which could carry a man over the sea.

"Hello," the little native answered in a soft, liquid voice. "Are you an ancestor ghost or a god ghost?"

And Tylus began learning about Imbry. ∞ ∞



A Message From Our Sponsor

by HENRY SLESAR

*The foot-in-the-door
technique would work
perfectly for any salesman
—if he had an invisible foot!*

Illustrated by LEE

“AND THAT was Smoky Donahue’s Western Swingsters, playing *Red Dust* for all you Martian fans out there. Now let’s take a look at the new recordings, hot off the presses this week from all over the system. Looks like we have a real treat for you tonight, folks! There’s a brand-new label from way out in outer space. Yes, sir, the very *first* record put on wax by the Martian Recording

Company, and it ought to be a lulu. We'll spin it for you in just a minute, but first, here's a message from our sponsor, the Oxygen Corporation of America—Earth's oldest and finest manufacturers of compressed oxygen equipment.

"Friends, when you're scooting around in your little rocket roadster, do you ever stop to think that your fine vehicle deserves nothing but the best in equipment and accessories? Well, next time, take a look at your oxygen tanks. Are you still using the cumbersome, old, outmoded tank, with ugly valves and low capacity? Wouldn't you rather have the new, streamlined Oxco tank that gives you months of service without refilling? Models cost as low as four thousand dollars, and they're guaranteed up to a full year. Call your local rocket supply store today, and get all the facts. When you see the new Oxco, you'll know why we say . . . Oxco never leaves you breathless!

"Well, I see Jonesy, our control board operator, waving at me like mad, folks. He wants to hear this new disc from Mars, too. So—without further ado—here we go. It's on the Canal label, and it's called . . . *Melancholy!*"

THE BOSS slammed the file drawer shut in disgust.

The Martian, standing before his desk, shuffled his feet and

rotated his cap with his third hand. "Displeasing you?" he said. "Come back other time do?"

"No!" Huber pointed to the chair. "You sit down. We're going to straighten this whole thing out right now."

He reached across the desk and snapped on the intercom. "Davis!" he said. "We're going to have a foremen's meeting. This minute!" Davis, at the other end, was inclined to argue, but the boss stopped him. "Don't tell me we're busy! I know our production schedule better than you do. Get the foremen up here right away!"

The foremen shuffled in ten minutes later. They looked sheepish, like small boys caught in the jam pot.

Huber got right to the point.

"Your boys have been picking on Chafnu again. *And I won't stand for it!*" He slapped the desk with a board-like palm for emphasis.

Curly, the foreman, said: "Aw, gee, boss. Just a little rhubarb, that's all. Just a little kiddin' around. Boys didn't mean any harm."

"Mean any *harm?*" Huber's eyes went so wide they threatened to pop out on the desk. "Chafnu! Show it to 'em."

The Martian looked embarrassed. Then he slowly lifted his rope-like foot and displayed the quarter-sized burn on the heel.

"Kidding around!" Huber looked dangerous. "That's what you call kidding around? They could have burned Chafnu to a crisp! You know how sensitive he is!"

Burke, the small parts man, said placatingly: "Well, the boys are kinda edgy, Mr. Huber. It must be the weather or something. They need a little what-do-you-call-it, outlet."

"Besides," said Curly, "the Goons kinda provoke 'em, you know what I mean—"

"Don't ever use that word to me!"

The irritation that had been brewing in Huber all day now boiled over. He walked around the desk and shoved his big-jawed face up close to Curly's chin. His small stature made no difference; Curly trembled nervously.

"They're Martians," the boss said. "Not Goons. Understand? *Martians!* Isn't that right, Chafnu?"

Chafnu looked as if he wished Earth had never been born. He glanced up guiltily at the assembled foremen.

"All right," said Huber. "Now let's get this straight. One more incident like today, and I'll hold you guys responsible. Chafnu and all the other Martians in this plant are doing good work—better, if you want to know, than most of you Earth guys—"

"Sure," mumbled Curly. "If we had three hands, we could—"

"That's enough, I said!" shouted the boss. He swabbed his forehead with his hand. "We got Oxco tanks to turn out, so let's get to it. The meeting's over!"

The foremen left, more crestfallen than when they had entered the office. Chafnu looked uncertain as to what he should do next. The Martian simply sat and watched Huber go back to his desk.

The boss went over to the musaphone and flipped the switch.

"My nerves are shot," he told Chafnu.

He sat back in his swivel chair, sighed, and closed his eyes. The haunting strains of *Melancholy* drifted through the office, and Huber listened and slowly relaxed.

The Martian just sat there, miserably.

"Hi, THERE, fly-boys!"

"Time to climb into the wild black yonder again, with your old skipper, Vince Vanelli, bringing aid and comfort to all the ships in space. We got a rocket chamber full of new notes and blue notes, all the latest hits from the Bings of Earth to the Rings of Saturn. So buckle your g-belts, and lend an ear to the biggest instrumental smash that's hit the System in an eon.

"You asked for it, spacemen, so here it is again. That everloving outer-space symphony—*Melancholy!*"

THE *Pursuit* was in orbit when the accident happened.

Earth's gravity gripped it like a giant hand and brought it plummeting down into a granite quarry in Wisconsin. It was a Sunday, and the explosion of the ship's reactors didn't kill anyone but the two pilots. There was a routine investigation, but the evidence, as usual, was spread across too many states to make it productive.

But when the *Marjorie*, a space freighter, got herself in trouble, the pilot managed to reach the Earth Communication Center before he disappeared forever into the Mediterranean. The voice cried out something like "Ox on the bum!"

Then the *Pinafore* registered an S.O.S. This time an accident was avoided. A tug was dispatched to the site in a hurry, and the pilots were transferred. The captain of the tug submitted his log to the Space Commerce board, and the most pertinent page read:

"*Pinafore's* oxygen tanks (mfr. Oxco, Serial #2853) were defective, and were seriously endangering life aboard."

DIANA HUBER tilted the decanter and held it over the glass

a little too long for her husband's liking.

"Easy, easy," he cried from his chair. "How much of that stuff do you think I can take?"

"This one's mine," she said, starting to pour another.

Huber shifted in his seat. "Aren't you overdoing it, honey?" he asked uneasily. "I mean, do you really think you should drink so much?"

"It kills time," she said. "It makes the hours a little shorter. What else have I got to do? You've got your job. What have I got?"

"Well, I only meant—I mean, if the kids—"

"The kids are pasted to the screen," she replied, meaning that they were at the TV set. She flopped on the overstuffed sofa and yanked her skirt almost up to her thighs. She still had lovely legs, Huber thought, but she used them like an old frump. And she wasn't even fifty—just forty-seven. Why did she have to flop around that way?

"Well, let's have it," she said, twirling the amber fluid in her glass. "My Hard Day at the Office. By George Huber, Age Eleven."

He looked up, almost shyly. "Oh, nothing new," he said in a low voice. "Same old stuff."

Diana swallowed half her Scotch. She gave a little cough, blinked, and said harshly: "You

know that's not so. Something's up. Some kind of labor trouble. And your tanks are blowing out all over space. Is that the 'same old stuff,' George, dear?"

Huber put down his paper. "It's the men!" he said. "They've gone nuts or something! Mopin' around all day, singin' the blues, snapping your head off if you make one little suggestion—"

Diana closed her eyes. "I'm listening. Go on."

"Something's gone wrong with all of them," said Huber, eager to pour out his overburdened heart. "They act like they just don't want to work. Turning out plain junk on the assembly line. Even the Accuracy Control boys are letting down on the job, and they're supposed to be cracker-jacks! In fact, the only guys that are doing any kind of job are the Martians. I hired myself fifteen more today. But that's only gonna stir up *more* fuss . . ."

"I hate them," said Diana, sipping slowly and looking down into her glass moodily. "Ugly, slippery things. Ugh!"

"What?" said Huber blankly.

"Your Martian friends. Taking away good jobs from Earth people. Never buying anything. And those awful arms! If you ask me, we ought to send them right back where they—"

"You don't know them!" he interrupted loudly. "They're nice, quiet folks. They work hard and

they don't give you a hard time. They're ten times as efficient as some of the bums in—"

"All right, all right! You don't have to shout at me." Diana stood up and gulped the rest of her drink down. Then she went over to the phonograph.

"Are you going to play that song again?" asked Huber.

"Do you mind?" she said sarcastically. "I happen to like it."

Huber said something under his breath and returned to his paper. But when the record started, he put it down and just listened as the strange, haunting Martian melody filled the room.

BLINKER: Then the Martian says, "For Pete's sake! Why can't you clean up this filthy cave sometimes?"

STRAIGHT MAN: So what did his wife say?

BLINKER: So his wife says, "What do you expect? I've only got three hands!"

(LAUGHTER)

STRAIGHT MAN: Well, tell me, Blinker—what else did you do on your trip to Mars? Did you meet any—what's wrong?

BLINKER: Nothing's wrong. Just don't step in front of the camera, that's all.

STRAIGHT MAN: Hah, hah. Sorry, old man. Er—tell me, what else did you do on—

BLINKER: Now for Chris-sakes, I told you to get out of the

way! What're you trying to do? Hog the show?

DIRECTOR: (OFF CAMERA) Psst! Blinker! What are you doing? We're on the air!

BLINKER: I don't care if we're on the air - - - - air! I won't be pushed around!

STRAIGHT MAN: You won't, huh? Okay, you fat tub of lard! I've had enough of you—

DIRECTOR: Blinker! Adams!

BLINKER: I'll punch that stupid face right into—

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, due to circumstances beyond our control, the Universal Broadcasting Company interrupts the Joe Blinker Comedy Hour to bring you a program of recorded mood music. Our first selection is a popular record on the Canial label, entitled *Melancholy*.

THE CHAIRMAN rapped his gavel for order.

"One more demonstration like that, and we'll have to clear the room of spectators," he warned. "This inquiry is a serious matter, and we cannot permit levity. Now, Mr. Collins, go on with your testimony."

Montague Collins, the 51% owner of the Oxygen Corporation of America, looked uncomfortable.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I did not mean to be funny. I agree with the chair that defective equipment is a serious busi-

ness, and my reference to the Martians' three hands was meant in earnest."

"We understand. Go ahead, Mr. Collins."

"I was merely stating that, contrary to articles in the public press, the Martians' efficiency level has been more than maintained at the Oxco plant. It's the human efficiency level that has declined."

There was an excited buzzing.

"I believe," he continued, mopping his face, "that this fact will be borne out by the experience of many other manufacturers. And I'd like to submit in evidence some replies to letters I have sent to executives all over America. You will see that they corroborate what I have told you. May I have the Chair's permission to read these replies as part of my testimony?"

"It does not seem relevant at the moment, Mr. Collins, but they may be submitted for publication into the record. Please tell us about your own experience."

"I'm afraid I do not have much to add. As a result of our troubles, we are increasing the number of Martian employees considerably."

"Just how many is 'considerable,' Mr. Collins?"

Montague Collins cleared his throat.

"We now employ four Mar-

tians to every three humans."

Not even the gavel could quiet the spectators this time.

CURLY was about to demolish a ham-and-swiss on rye. But when the Martian moved across his line of vision, he paused and called out:

"Hey, Chafnu!"

The Martian stopped and swiveled his bulbous head around at the foreman. "Yes?" he said.

"Want a bite of this?" He held up the sandwich.

"No, your thanks," said Chafnu.

"Go on, have a taste. It's good for you."

"Do not think this," said Chafnu, trying to solve the old riddle of how to produce an engaging smile. He merely succeeded in looking like a surprised beetle.

"Whatsamatter, Chafnu? Too good to eat with your foreman?" Curly flushed. The hirings-and-firings of the last two months had unnerved him, and the fact that he was handling his own job poorly only made the situation worse.

"Have not required to food," said the Martian. "Best existence of silicone substances. Understanding do? However, your thanks, and very."

He began to move on, but Curly was obviously in the mood for trouble. He got up from the

bench and put his beefy hand around one of Chafnu's arms.

"It's pain," said Chafnu mildly. "Improvement if released, your thanks."

"You're a wise guy, Chafnu," said Curly. He knew that he was skirting a dangerous edge, but he was just too irritated to care. "You're a bug-eyed bastard. What do you say about that?"

"I have comment inward," the Martian answered, trying to pull away from the foreman's grip.

"In fact," said Curly, now squeezing harder, "I got a good mind to kick you right in the seat of the pants. And keep kick-in' till you fly right back to Mars."

"Pain," said Chafnu. "Can release do?"

"And what if I don't?"

"Am in power yours," said the Martian.

"You're goddam right. And I'm going to give you a little lesson in manners, you—"

"Curly!"

Huber came striding over fast, and the look on his face was sufficient to make the foreman drop both Martian and sandwich.

"Gee, boss, I—"

"Never mind!" Huber thundered. "You had the chance. Now you're getting your walking papers! Get out of here, Curly! Get out of here now!"

"But Mr. Huber—"

"I said *beat it!* You're not the

foreman around here any more. And in case you want to know who your successor is, take a good look!"

Huber pointed a shaking finger at Chafnu, who bowed his head modestly.

". . . AND here it is, folks! The big one! The top one! The melody that swept the Solar System! You've proved that you love it. All the disc jokey requests, all the record sales, all the juke-box half-dollars have shown that, once more, for the forty-first week in a row—the number one tune on your hit parade is—

"Melancholy!"

"But don't get excited, folks! Because I'm *not* going to play it for you! I'm going to spin it all for myself—and you can just sit there and drool! And if anybody wants to fire me for it, let 'em go ahead and see if I care! Heh, heh, heh—*Ulp!*"

WOOLSEY, of the U.S. Department of Labor, zipped up his brief case and went over to the office window.

He looked outside at the Capitol building, but the location permitted only a fractional view of the impressive edifice. Anyway, the sun was shining brightly and the grass was green.

The man sitting in the chair facing his desk recalled his presence with a polite cough.

"Oh," said Woolsey, turning

around. "Sorry. Mind's wandering, I guess."

"I know how you feel, Mr. Woolsey. My job is getting me down, too. Can't seem to get interested in the newspaper any more. Just the thought of working irritates me."

Woolsey sat down, humming softly to himself. He toyed with a paper clip, then started to bend it out of shape.

"But I guess I better get the story," sighed the man in the chair. "Boss will give me hell otherwise. Although," he added, "he seems to care about working even less than I do."

"Yes," said Woolsey abstractedly. "My, it certainly is a nice day. Damn shame to be indoors on a day like this."

"What say we go for a walk?" asked the reporter. "We can take a stroll around the fountain. We can do our business just as well."

"Splendid idea!" said Woolsey. "This place is getting on my nerves."

Outside, the Assistant Labor Secretary said:

"Oh, it's true, all right. The Martian labor force now outnumber the humans by five to one. Some companies have completely converted to Martians—like the Oxco Corporation, for instance. In fact, it probably won't be very long before we'll have an all-Martian labor force across the country."

The reporter said: "Can I quote you?"

"If you like." The Labor man shrugged. "Seems like employers just can't find men interested in their jobs. But the Martians go merrily along, using their three hands at maximum efficiency. And it's not just in manual labor that they're gaining tremendous amounts of ground."

"How do you mean?"

Woolsey paused by the flowing fountain, watching the cool gusher leap from the mouth of a stone fish.

"Well," he said vaguely, "they're taking over other kinds of work. White collar stuff. Teaching. Architecture. In fact, I hear that the Brooklyn Dodgers are considering a Martian for third base—"

"No!"

Woolsey said: "Water looks nice, doesn't it? I wonder if they would mind if I took my shoes off and—"

"Mr. Woolsey!"

"Oh, just for a minute, you know. Can't see any harm in it. Matter of fact, should be quite refreshing."

"Yes, but, sir—"

"Oh, come now," said Woolsey, starting to unlace his shoes. "If you'd rather work, go ahead. I want to relax." He took his shoes off and began to work on the socks, humming the strains of *Melancholy* to himself.

The reporter scratched his head. "I *don't* want to work," he confessed. "I haven't wanted to work for months. The whole idea of working just makes me sore."

He hesitated a moment, and then reached down for his shoe-laces.

THE MARTIAN stood in front of the boss's desk, but this time, there was no nervousness in his manner.

"Chafnu—" said Huber.

"Yes, sir?" said the new foreman.

"Chafnu, I have something to tell you. And I don't know how you're going to take it."

"Please?" said Chafnu.

Huber got up and went to the table. There was a leather suitcase perched on top. He took it off and placed it on his desk; then he opened it. He reached over and took Diana's photograph from the blotter and put it inside.

"You've been doing a good job," the boss continued. "An excellent job, as a matter of fact."

"Properly thanking," said Chafnu.

"I don't want you to thank me. It's only logical, after all. Especially when we put nothing but Martians in your shop. We needed a Martian foreman then."

He went to the bookcase, lifted out two of the books, and dropped them into the suitcase.

"Now things have changed

again, Chafnu. Changed drastically. And the Oxygen Corporation of America is going to need your help."

"Desirable of service," said Chafnu. "Very willing of it."

"I know you are. And that's why the Board of Directors have decided that you should take over the whole show." He clicked the suitcase shut with an air of finality.

"Uncomprehend," said the Martian blankly.

"We're an all-Martian plant now," Huber said. "Even the front office will soon be all-Martian. The stockholders figure that the only reasonable thing to do is put a Martian in charge of everything. You were my recommendation, and the Board accepted it."

"But strange. You work job, do not?"

"If you mean it's my job, the answer is no. It's not my job any more. Oh, don't feel sorry for me. I *want* to quit. I just haven't been pulling my weight around here for the last year. I'm getting lazy or something, Chafnu. The whole idea of working bores me silly."

Huber went over to the telephone and turned it on.

"*Melancholy*," he said, as the haunting phrases emerged from the loudspeaker. "That's the way I feel about working. You know something, Chafnu? Sometimes I

think that damned tune has something to do with it!"

"Sir?"

"Oh, I know it sounds crazy. But somehow, the way I feel about working and the way that tune sounds—they're all mixed up in my mind. Oh, well." The boss picked up his suitcase. "The job's yours, Chafnu. So's the office. Both of 'em aren't the greatest in the world, but I had some fun."

He stuck out his hand. "Good luck," he said.

"Cannot," said Chafnu.

"What?"

"Impossible for acceptance," said the Martian.

"But why?" said Huber. "You know you can handle it."

"Confidence great and very," said the Martian. "But reason is not for acceptance. Plentiful job for Martians."

"I don't get you."

"Declined offer responsible to plan change, understand. Quitting from factory do Chafnu. Otherwise business."

"You mean you're leaving the factory? You're going to take another job?" Huber looked befuddled.

"Excitement offer," said the Martian. "Great salary remuneration. Opportunity."

"Well, I'll be damned." Huber grinned and slapped Chafnu lightly on his sensitive back. "I guess you know what you're do-

ing, Chafnu. Plenty of opportunities for a Martian these days—especially since humans don't seem to want to work."

"Situation so," said Chafnu.

"Okay, then," said Huber. "Whatever you have in mind, Chafnu, I hope you make a go of it. Good luck, old pal!"

"Friendship," said Chafnu warmly, clasping Huber's hand in his three and shaking it enthusiastically.

"HELLO you today! Time again emerging for spins on table with disc black musical. Back up and sit relax! Pipe smoke and good food eating! Abundance music available herein, bring pleasure immensely into home yours. Currency latest in recordings, employing old yours Chicho Chafnu, piping soon big favorite Martian song *Melancholy*.

"But firstly, a message from sponsor ours. . . ."

∞ ∞ ∞

TALES FOR TOMORROW

Dr. Gordon Arpe didn't particularly want to be captain of the second expedition to Centaurus. But he was the only man on Earth who could be—he had invented the new drive that powered the *Flyaway II*, and no one else understood it! To make matters worse, he had strict orders to jettison the passengers if he had to—as long as he saved the drive! And that's just the opening situation of "The Long Way Home" by James Blish, a space travel novelet which sparkles with new ideas and gathers tension as it goes along. It's sure to rate as one of the best of this year, or any year.

Something else entirely is "Jokester" by Isaac Asimov. Asimov has always been a paradox: his stories are deadly serious and heavily scientific, while in person he is one of the funniest people alive. His newest story will prove a revelation to readers who've wondered about this; it not only presents an entirely different Asimov than you've ever seen in print, it also explains for the first time in history where all the jokes in the world come from!

You'll find both of these, and many more, in the December issue of INFINITY—the magazine that's always first with the brightest, freshest ideas in science fiction!

The choice of weapons was completely unlimited. But what good was that, when neither duelist knew which weapons were his, and which his enemy's?

Illustrated by EMSH

THE SILVER CORRIDOR

by HARLAN ELLISON

"WE CAN'T be responsible for death or disfigurement, you know," reminded the duelsmaster.

He toyed with the company emblem on his ceremonial robe absently, awaiting Marmorth's answer. Behind him, across the onyx and crystal expanse of the reception chamber, the gaping maw of the silver corridor opened into blackness.

"Yes, yes, I know all that," snapped Marmorth impatiently. "Has Krane entered his end?" he asked, casting a glance at the dilation-segment leading to the adjoining preparation room. There was fear and apprehension



in the look, only thinly hidden.

"Not quite yet," the duelsmaster told him. "By now he has signed the release, and they are briefing him, as I'm about to brief you, if you'll kindly sign yours." He indicated the printed form in the built-in frame and the stylus on the desk.

Marmorth licked his lips, grumbled briefly, and flourished the stylus on the blank line. The duelsmaster glanced quickly at the signature, then pressed the stud on the desk top. The blank slipped out of sight inside the desk. He carefully took the stylus from Marmorth's unfeeling fingers, placed it in its holder. They waited patiently for a minute. A soft clucking came up through a slot at the side of the desk, and a second later a punched plastic plate dropped into a trough beneath it.

"This is your variation-range card," explained the duelsmaster, lifting the plate from the basket. "With this we can gauge the extent of your imagination, set up the illusions, send you through the corridor at your own mental pace."

"I understand perfectly, Duelsman," snapped Marmorth. "Do you mind getting me in there! I'm freezing in this breechclout!"

"Mr. Marmorth, I realize this is annoying, but we are required both by statute of law and rule of the company to explain thor-

oughly the entire sequence, before entrance." He stood up behind the desk, reached into a cabinet that dilated at the approach of his hand.

"Here," he said, handing Marmorth a wraparound, "put this on till we've finished here."

Marmorth let breath whistle between his teeth in irritation, but donned the robe and sat back down in front of the desk. Marmorth was a man of medium height, hair graying slightly at the temples and forelock, a middle-aged stomach bulge. He had dark, not-quite-piercing eyes, and straight plain features. An undistinguished man at first glance, yet one who had a definite touch of authority and determination about him.

"As you know—" began the duelsmaster.

"Yes, yes, confound it! *I know, I know!* Why must you people prolong the agony of this thing?" Marmorth cut him off, rising again.

"Mr. Marmorth," resumed the duelsmaster patiently but doggedly, "if you don't settle yourself, we will call this affair off. Do you understand?"

Marmorth chuckled ruefully, deep in his throat. "After the tolls Krane and I laid out? You won't cancel."

"We will if you aren't prepared for combat. It's for your own survival, Mr. Marmorth.

Now, if you'll be silent a minute, I'll brief you and you can enter the corridor."

Marmorth waved his hand negligently, grudging the duelsman his explanation. He stared in boredom at the high crystal ceiling of the reception chamber.

"The corridor, as you know," went on the duelsman, adding the last phrase with sarcasm, "is a super-sensitive receptor. When you enter it, a billion scanning elements pick up your thoughts, down to the very subconscious, filter them through the banks, correlating them with your variation-range card, and feed back illusions. These illusions are matched with those of your opponent, as checked with *his* variation-range card. The illusion is always the same for both of you.

"Since you are in the field of the corridor, these are substantial illusions, and they affect you as though they were real. In other words, to illustrate the extreme—you can die at any moment. They are not dreams, I assure you, even though they are not consciously projected. All too often combatants find an illusion so strange they feel it must be unreal. May I caution you, Mr. Marmorth, that is the quickest way to lose an affair. Take everything you see at face value. *It is real!*"

He paused for a moment, wip-

ing his forehead. He had begun to perspire freely. Marmorth wondered at this, but remained silent.

"Your handicap," the duelsmaster resumed, "is that when an illusion is formed from a larger segment of your opponent's imagination than from yours, he will be more familiar with it, and will be better able to use it against you. The same holds true for you, of course.

"The illusions will strengthen for the combatant who is dominating. In other words, if Krane's outlook is firmer than yours, he will have a more familiar illusion. If you begin to dominate him, the illusion will change to one that is more of your making.

"Do you understand?"

Marmorth had found himself listening more intently than he had thought he would. Now he had questions.

"Aren't there any weapons we begin with? I'd always thought we could choose our dueling weapons."

The duelsmaster shook his head, "No. There will be sufficient weapons in your illusions. Anything else would be superfluous."

"How can an illusion kill me?"

"You are in the corridor's field. Through a process of—well, actually, Mr. Marmorth,

that is a company secret, and I doubt if it could be explained in lay terms so that you would know any more now than you did before. Just accept that the corridor converts your thought-impressions into tangibles."

"How long will we be in there?"

"Time is subjective in the corridor. You may be there for an hour or a month or a year. Out here the time will seem as an instant. You will go in, both of you; then, a moment later—one of you will come out."

Marmorth licked his lips again. "Have there been duels where a stalemate was reached—where both combatants came back?" He was nervous, and the question trembled out.

"We've never had one that I can recall," answered the duelsmaster simply.

"Oh," said Marmorth quietly, looking down at his hands.

"Are you ready now?" asked the duelsman.

Marmorth nodded silently. He slipped out of the wraparound and laid it across the back of the chair. Together they walked toward the silver corridor. "Remember," said the duelsmaster, "the combatant who has the strongest convictions will win. That is a constant, and your only real weapon!"

The duelsmaster stepped to the end of the corridor and pass-

ed his hand across an area of wall next to its opening.

A light above the opening flashed twice, and he said, "I've signalled the duelsman on the other side. Krane has entered the corridor."

The duelsmaster slipped the variation-range card into a slot in the blank wall, then indicated Marmorth should step into the corridor.

The duelist stepped forward, smoothing the short breechclout against his thighs as he walked.

He took one step, two, three. The perfectly round mouth of the silver corridor gaped before him, black and impenetrable.

He stepped forward once more. His bare foot touched the edge of the metal, and he drew back hesitantly. He looked back over his shoulder at the duelsman. "Couldn't I—"

"Step in, Mr. Marmorth," said the duelsmaster firmly. There was a granite tone in his voice.

Marmorth walked forward into the darkness. It closed over his head and seeped behind his eyes. He felt nothing! Marmorth blinked . . .

TWICE. The first time he saw the throne room and the tier-mounted pages, long-stemmed trumpets at their sides. He saw the assembled nobles bowing low before him, their ermine capes sweeping the floor. The floor was

a rich, inlaid mosaic, the walls dripped color and rich tapestry, the ceiling was high-arched and studded with crystal chandeliers.

The second time he opened them, hoping his senses had cleared, he saw precisely the same thing. Then he saw Krane—*High Lord* Krane, he somehow knew—in the front ranks.

The garb was different—a tight suit of chain-mail in blued-steel, ornamental decorations across the breastplate, a ruby-hilted sword in a scabbard at the waist, full, flowing cape of blood-red velvet—but the face was no different from the one Marmorth had seen in the Council Chamber, before they had agreed to duel.

The face was thin: a V that swept past a high, white forehead and thick, black brows, past the high cheekbones and needle-thin nose, down to the slash mouth and pointed black beard. A study in coal and chalk.

The man's hair had been swept back to form a tight knot at the base of his skull. It was the knot of the triumphant warrior.

Marmorth's blood churned at the sight of the despised Krane! If he hadn't challenged Marmorth's Theorem in the Council Chamber, with his insufferable slanders, neither of them would be here.

Here!

Marmorth stiffened. He sat more erect. The word swept away his momentary forgetfulness: this was the silver corridor. This was illusion. They were dueling—now, at this instant! He had to kill Krane.

But whose illusion was this? His own, or the dark-bearded scoundrel's before him? It might be suicide to attempt killing Krane in his own illusion. He would have to wait a bit and gauge what the situation represented in his own mind.

Whatever it was, he seemed to be of higher rank than Krane, who bowed before him.

Almost magically, before he realized the words were emerging from his mouth, he heard himself saying, "Lord Krane, rise!"

The younger man stood up, and the other nobles followed suit, the precedent having been set. By choosing Krane to rise first, Marmorth the King had chosen whom he wanted to speak first in the Star Chamber.

"May it please Your Illustriousness," boomed Krane, extending his arms in salute, "I have a disposition on the prisoners from Quorth. I should beg Your Eminence's verdict on my proposal."

He bowed his head and waited Marmorth's reply.

Had there been a tone of mockery in the man's voice? Marmorth could not be sure. But

he did know, now, that it was his own illusion. If Krane was coming to *him* for disposition, then he must be in the ascendant in this creation.

"What is your proposal, High Lord Krane?" asked Marmorth.

Krane took a step forward, bringing him to the bottom of the dais upon which Marmorth's throne rested.

"These *things* are of a totally alien culture, Your Highness," began Krane. "How can we, as humans, even tolerate their existence in our way of life? The very sight of them makes the gorge rise! They are evil-smelling and accursedly-formed! They must all be destroyed, Your Highness! We must ignore the guileful offers of a prisoner-for-prisoner exchange! We will have our fleet in Quorth City within months; then we can rescue our own captured without submitting to the demands of foul monsters! In the meantime, why feed these beasts of another world?"

"I say, destroy them! Launch all-out attack now! Rescue our people from the alien's slave camps on Quorth and Fetsa!"

He had been speaking smoothly and forcefully. The nods of assent and agreement from the assembled nobles made Marmorth wary. A complete knowledge of the Quorth-Human war was in his mind, and the plan of Krane sounded clear and fine.

Yet, superimposed over it, was his knowledge that this was all merely illusion and that somewhere in the illusion might be a chink in which his errors could lodge. The plan sounded good, but . . .

"No, Krane!" he decided, thinking quickly. "This would be what the aliens want! They *want* us to destroy our prisoners. That would whip their people at home into such a frenzy of patriotism—we would be engulfed in a month!"

"We will consider the alien proposal of prisoner-for-prisoner exchange."

The rumbles from the massed nobles rose into the cavern of the Star Chamber. There was unrest here.

He had to demonstrate that he was right. "Let them bring in the chain of aliens!" he commanded, clapping his hands. A page went out swiftly.

While the hall waited, Marmorth concentrated fiercely: had he made the proper decision? There seemed to be a correlation between Krane's challenging of his Theorem of Government in the Council—back in the world outside the corridor—and this proposal he had just defeated.

There *was* a correlation! He saw it suddenly!

Both his proposal of the Theorem in the Council and his decision here in the illusion had been

based on his personal concept of government. Krane's refutation out there and his proposal here were the opposite. Once again they had clashed.

And this time Marmorth had won!

But had he?

Even as he let the thought filter, the chained aliens were dragged between the massed nobles and cast on their triple-jointed knees before Marmorth's dais. "Here are the loathesome beings!" cried Krane, flinging his arms high and apart.

It had been a grandstand gesture, and the frog-faced, many-footed beings on the Star Chamber's floor realized it.

Suddenly, almost as though they were made of paper, the chains that had joined the aliens snapped, and they leaped on the nobles.

Marmorth caught the smile on Krane's lips. *He* had been behind this; probably had the chains severed in the corridor outside by some henchman!

Without thinking, Marmorth was off his throne and down the stepped dais, his sword free from its scabbard and arcing viciously.

A hideously warted alien face rose before him and he thrust with all his might! The blade pierced between the double-lidded eyes, and thick ochre blood spurted across his tunic. He yanked the blade free, kicking the

dead but still quivering alien from its length. He leaped, howling a familiar battle-cry.

Even as he leaped, he saw Krane's slash-mouthed smile, and the Lord's sword swinging toward him!

So it *hadn't* been his illusion! It had been Krane's! He hadn't chosen the proper course. Krane's belief at the moment was stronger than his own.

He fended off a double-handed smash from the black-bearded noble, and fell back. They parried and countered, thrust and slashed all around the dais. The other nobles were too deeply involved fighting off the screaming aliens to witness this battle between their King and his Lord.

Krane beat Marmorth back, back!

Why did I choose as I did? Marmorth wailed mentally, berating himself.

Suddenly he slipped, toppling backwards onto the steps. The sword flew from his hand as it cracked against the edge of a step. He saw Krane bearing down on him, the sword double-fisted as his opponent raised it like a stake above his head.

In desperation, Marmorth summoned up all his belief. "*It was the right decision!*" screamed Marmorth with the conviction of a man about to die. He saw the sword plunge toward his breast as . . .

HE GATHERED the light about him, sweeping his hands through the dripping colors, making them shift and flow. He saw the figure of Krane, standing haughtily in the bank of yellow, and he gathered the blue to himself in a coruscating ball.

Fearsomely he bellowed his challenge, "This is *my* illusion, Krane! Watch as I kill you!"

He balled the blue in his hand and sent it flying, dripping sparks and color as it shot toward the black-bearded man.

They both stood tall and spraddle-legged in the immensity of they knew-not-where. The colors dripped from the air, making weird patterns as they mixed.

The blue ball struck in front of Krane and exploded, cascading a rich flood of chromatic brilliance into the air. Krane laughed at the failure.

He gathered the black to him, wadding it in strong and supple fingers. He wound up, almost as though it were a sport, and flung the wadded black at Marmorth.

The older man knew he had not yet built enough belief to withstand this onslaught. If the black enfolded him he would die in the never-ending limbo of nothingness.

He thrust hands up before his face to stop the onrush of the black, but it struck him and he fell, clutching feebly at a washy stringer of white.

He fell into the black as it billowed up to surround him.

This was not his illusion! It could not be, for he was vanquished! Yet he was not dead, as he had felt sure he would be. He lay there, thinking.

He remembered all the effort he had put in on the Political Theorem. The Theorem he had proposed in the Council. It had represented years of work—the culmination of all his adult thought and effort; and, he had to admit, the Theorem was soundly based on his own view of the Universe.

Then the presumptuous Krane had offended him by re-stating the Theorem.

Krane had, of course, twisted it to his own evil and malicious ends—basing it anew on *his* conception of the All.

There had been a verbal battle. There had been the accusations, the clanging of the electric gavel, the remonstrances of the Compjudge, the shocked expressions of the other Councillors! Till finally Marmorth had been goaded by the younger man into the duel. Into the silver corridor.

Only one of them would emerge. The one who did would force his own version of the Theorem on the Council. To be accepted, and used as a basis for future decisions and policy. Each Theorem—Marmorth's monumental original, and Krane's

malformed copy—was all-inclusive.

It all revolved, then, around whose view of the Universe, whose Theorem, was the right one. And it was inconceivable to Marmorth that Krane could be correct.

Marmorth struck out at the black! *Mine, mine, mine!* he shouted soundlessly. He lashed into the nothingness. *My Theorem is the proper one! It is true! Krane's is based on deceit!*

Then he saw the stringer of white in his hand. So this was Krane in the ascendant, was it? Now came the moment of retaliation!

He whipped the stringer around his head, swaying as he was, there in the depthless black. The stringer thickened. He cupped it to him, washing it with his hands, strengthening it, shaping and molding it.

In a moment it had grown. In a moment more the white had burst forth like a rope blossom and flooded all. Revealing Krane standing there, in his breechclout, massaging the pale pink between his fingers.

"Mine, Krane, *mine!*" he screamed, flinging the white!

Krane blanched and tried to duck. The white came on like a sliver of Forever, streaking and burning as it rode currents that did not exist. Then the light shattered, blazed into thousands

of spitting fragments. As Marmorth realized they had nullified each other again, that the illusion was dissolving around them, he heard Krane bellow, as loud as Marmorth himself had, "*Mine, Marmorth, mine!*"

The colors ran. They flowed, they merged, they sucked at his body, while he . . .

SHRANK UP against the glass wall next to Krane. They both stared in fascinated horror as the huge, ichor-dripping spider-thing advanced on them, mandibles clicking.

"My God in Heaven!" Marmorth heard Krane bellow. "What is it?" Krane scrabbled at the glass wall behind them, trying to get out. They were trapped.

The glass walls circled them. They were trapped with the spider-thing and each other, trapped in the tiny tomb!

Marmorth was petrified. He could not move or speak—he could hardly sense anything but terror. Spiders were his greatest personal fear. He found his legs were quivering at the knees, though he had not sensed it a moment before. The very sight of the hairy beasts had always sent shudders through him. Now he knew this was an illusion—his illusion. *He* was in the ascendant!

But how hideously in the as-

cendant. He wondered, almost hysterically, if he could control the illusion—use it against Krane.

The spider-thing advanced on them, the soft plush pads of its hundred feet leaving dampness where it stepped.

Krane fell to his knees, moaning and scratching at the glass floor. "Out, out, out, out . . ." he mumbled, froth dripping from his lips.

Marmorth realized this was his chance. This fear was a product of his own mind; he had lived with it all his life. He knew it more familiarly than Krane—he could not cancel it, certainly, but he could utilize it more easily than the other.

Here was where he would kill Krane. He pulled himself tightly to the wall, sweating palms flat to the glass, the valley of his backbone against the cool surface. "I'm right! The Theorem as I stated it i-is c-correct!" He said it triumphantly, though the note of terror quivered undisguised in his voice.

The spider-thing paused in its march, swung its clicking, ghastly head about as though confused, and altered direction by an inch. Away from Marmorth. It descended on Krane.

The black-bearded man looked up, saw it coming toward him, heard Marmorth's words. Even on the floor, half-sunk in shock,

he shouted, pounding his fists against the floor of glass, "Wrong, wrong, wrong! You're wrong! I can prove *my* Theorem is correct! The basic formation of the Judiciary should be planned in an ever-decreasing system of—"

Marmorth didn't even listen. He knew it was drivell! He knew the man was wrong! But the spider-thing had stopped once more. Now it paused between the two of them, its bulk shivering as though caught in a draft.

Krane saw the hesitation on the monster's part, and rose, the old confidence and impudence regained. He wiped his balled fists across his eyes, clearing them of tears. He continued speaking, steadily, in the voice of a fanatic. The man just could *not* recognize that he was wrong.

"You're insane, man!" Marmorth interjected, waving his hands with fervor. "The economy must be balanced by a code of fair practices with a guild system blocking efforts on the part of the Genres to rise into the control of the main wealth!" He went on and on, outlining the original—the only true—Theorem.

Krane, too, shouted and gesticulated, both of them suddenly oblivious to the monstrous, black spider-thing which had stopped completely between them, vacillating.

When Marmorth stopped for an instant to regain his breath, the beast would twist its neckless head toward him. Marmorth would then speed up his speech, spewing out detail upon detail, and the beast would sink back into uncertainty.

It was obviously a battle of belief. Whichever combatant had more conviction—that one would win.

They stood and shouted, screamed, outlined, explained and delineated for what seemed hours. Finally, as though in exasperation, the spider-thing began to turn. They both watched it, their mouths working, words pouring forth in twin streams of absolute, sincere belief.

They watched while . . .

THE STARSHIPS fired at each other mercilessly. Blast after blast exploded soundlessly into the vault of space. Marmorth found his fingers twisted in the epaulette at his right shoulder.

As he watched Krane's *Magnificent*-class destroyer wheel in the control-room screens, a half-naked, blood-soaked and perspiring crewman burst into the cabin's entrance-well.

"Captain, Captain, sir!" he implored.

Marmorth looked over the plastic rail, down into the well.

"What?" he snapped with brittleness.

"Cap'n, the port side is riddled! We're losing pressure from thirteen compartments. The reclamation mile is completely lost! The engineers group was in one of the compartments along that mile, Cap'n! They're all bloated and blue and dead in there! We can see them floating around without any . . ."

"*Get the Hell out of here!*" Marmorth snapped, lifting a spacetant from his chart-board and flinging it with all his strength at the crewman. The man ducked and the spacetant bounced off the bulkhead, snapping pieces from its intricate bulk.

"You maniac!" the man yowled, leaping back out of the well, through the exit port, as Marmorth reached for another missile.

Marmorth shut his eyes tight, blanking out the shuddering ship, space, the screens, everything.

"Right, right, right, right, right! I'm right!" he shouted, lifting clenched fists.

The explosion came in two parts, as though two torpedoes had been struck almost simultaneously. The ship rocked and heeled. Bits of metal sheared through the outer bulkheads, crashed against the opposite wall.

As the lights went dead, and the screams drove into his brain, Marmorth shouted his credo once

more, with all the force of his conviction, with all the power of his lungs, with all the strength in his gasping body.

"I'm right! May God strike me dead if I'm not right! I know I'm right, I made an inexhaustible . . .

"CHECK!" he finished, opening his eyes and looking back down at the chessboard. The pieces had, happily, not moved. He still had Krane blocked off.

"I say check," he repeated, smiling, steepling his fingers.

Krane's black-bearded face broke into a wry grimace.

"Most clever, my dear Marmorth," he congratulated the other with sarcasm. "You have forced me to touch a bishop."

Marmorth watched as Krane, with trembling fingers, reached down to the jet bishop. It was carved from stone, carved with such care and intricacy that its edges were precisely as they had been desired by the master craftsman. They were razor sharp.

The pieces were all cut the same. Both the blanché alabaster pieces before Marmorth, and the ebony-stone players under Krane's hand. The game had been constructed for men who played more than a "gentleman's game." There was death in each move.

Marmorth knew he was in the ascendant. Each of them had had

two illusions—that remembrance was sharp—and this was Marmorth's. How did he know? The older man looked down at the intricately-carved chess pieces. He was white, Krane was black. As clear as it could be.

"Uh, have you moved?" Marmorth inquired, his voice adrip with casualness. He knew the other had not yet touched his players. "I believe you still lie in check," he reminded.

He thought he heard a muted, "Damn you!" under Krane's breath, but could not be certain.

Slowly Krane touched the player, carefully sliding the fingers of his hand across the razor-thin, razor-sharp facets. The piece almost slid from his grasp, so loosely was he holding it, but the move was made in an instant.

Marmorth cursed mentally. Krane had calculated beautifully! Not only was his king blocked out from Marmorth's rook—Marmorth's check-piece—but in another two moves (so clearly obvious, as Krane had desired it) his own queen would be in danger. In his mind he could hear Krane savoring the words: "*Garde! I say garde, my dear Marmorth!*"

He had to move the queen out of position.

He had to touch the queen!

The most deadly piece on the board!

"No!" he gasped.

"I beg your pardon?" said Krane, the slash-mouth opening in a twisted grin.

"N-nothing, nothing!" snapped Marmorth. He concentrated.

There was little chance he could maneuver that thousand-edged queen without bleeding to death for his trouble. Lord! It was an insoluble, a double-edged, dilemma. If he did not move, Krane would win. If he won, it was obvious that Marmouth would die. He had seen the deadly dirk's hilt protruding slightly from Krane's cummerbund when the other had sat down. If he *did* move, he would bleed to death before Krane's taunting eyes.

You shall never have that pleasure! he thought, the bitter determination of a man who will not be defeated rising in him.

He approached the queen, with hand, with eye.

The base was faceted, like a diamond. Each facet ended in a cutting edge so sensitive he knew it would sever the finger that touched it. The shape of the upper segments was involved, gorgeously-made. A woman, arms raised above her head, stretching in tension. Beautiful—and untouchable.

Then the thought struck him: *Is this the only move?*

Deep within his mind he calculated. He could not possibly recognize the levels on which his intellect was working. In with

his chess theory, in with his mental agility, in with his desire to win, his Theorem re-arranged itself, fitting its logic to this situation. How could the Theorem be applied to the game? What other paths, through the infallible truth of the Theorem—in which he believed, now, more strongly than ever before—could he take?

Then the alternative move became clear. He could escape a rout, escape the *garde*, escape the taunting smile of Krane by moving a relatively safe knight. It was not a completely fool-proof action, since the knight, too, was a razored piece of death, but he had found a way to avoid certain defeat by Krane's maneuverings.

"Ha!" the terrible smile burst upon his face. His eyes bored across to the other's. Krane turned white as Marmorth reached out, touched the one piece he had been desperately hoping the older man would not consider.

Marmorth felt an uncontrollable tightening in his throat as he realized the game would go on, and on, and on and . . .

HE UNCLENCHED his fist as the volcano leaped up around them.

It was more than the inside of a volcanic cone, however. The corridor was there, too. The dung-brown walls of smooth

rock shivered ever so slightly, and both men knew the silver corridor was just beyond their vision. They could see it glimmering with unreality.

It was almost as though they were looking at a double exposure; an extinct volcano superimposed over the shining tube of the silver corridor.

It isn't far away, thought Marmorth. He felt, with a sudden release of nervous tension, *Someone is going to win soon.*

He stared up at the faint patch of gray sky, visible through the roundly jagged opening at the cone's top. The walls sloped down in a fluid concavity. Here and there across the rough floor of the cavern, stalagmites rose up in sharp spikes.

And there—over and through the walls of the dead formations—the corridor hung faintly. A ghostly, shivering, not-quite-real shadow, inside the substance of their illusion.

They stood and stared at each other. Each knowing they were not really in the heart of a volcano, but in a metal corridor. Each knowing they could die as easily by this illusion as they could at each other's hands. Each asking the same questions.

Was this the end? Were there a limited number of illusions to each affair? A set pattern to each duel? Who had won? Could there *be* a winner?

They stared at each other, across the dusky interior of the extinct volcano.

"I'm right," said Krane, hesitantly.

"You're wrong," answered Marmorth quickly. "*I'm* the one who's right!"

In a moment they were at it again, each screaming till his lungs were raw with the effort, and red patches had appeared in their cheeks. They paused for an instant, gathering air for another tirade, Krane looking about him for a weapon.

They were both as they had begun. Naked save the breechclouts which clung to their buttocks.

They resumed their shouting, the sound reverberating hollowly in the dim interior of the volcano. The sounds hit them, bounced across the stone walls, reverberated again. The fury had been built to a peak and pitch they both knew could not be exceeded. They had strained every last vestige of belief and conviction in their minds.

As Marmorth realized he was at the pinnacle of his belief, he saw the same conviction come over Krane's face. He knew that from here on in, it would be a physical thing, with both of them stalemated in illusory power.

Then the woman-thing appeared.

She plopped into being between them. She wasn't human. There was no question about that. Marmorth took a halting step backward. Krane remained rooted, though his pale face had blanched an even more deadly shade. A strangled, "My God, what *is* it?" slipped past Marmorth's lips.

It was less than human, yet more than mortal; it was a travesty of a human being. A mad nightmare of a vision! Like some fearsome god of an ancient cult, it paused with long legs apart, hands on hips.

The woman's body was lush. Full, high breasts, trim stomach, exciting legs. Gorgeously proportioned and seductive, the torso and legs, the chest and arms, were normal—even exaggeratedly normal.

But there all resemblance to a woman ceased.

The head was a lizard-like thing, with elongated snout, wattles, huge glowing eyes set atop the skull. Looking out through flesh-sockets thick and deep—little hummocks atop the face—the eyes were small, crimson and cruel.

The nose was almost nonexistent. Two breather-spaces pulsed, one on either side of a small rise in the yellowed, pocked flesh of the head.

The mouth was a wide, gaping, and triangular orifice, with

triple rows of shark teeth in the upper and lower jaws. The woman-thing looked like a gorgeous female—with the weirdly altered head of a crocodile.

The ebony, leathery, bat's wings rising from the shoulder blades — quivering — completed the frightening picture.

Wisps of smoky, filmy garments were draped over the woman-thing's shoulders, around her waist. She stood absolutely unmoving.

Then she spoke to them.

It was not mental. It actually sounded, but not from the body before them. They knew it was —her?—but it did not come from her at all. The fearful mouth remained almost shut, propped slightly open on the sharp tiers of teeth.

The voice issued from the walls, from the tips of the stalagmites, from the high, arching roof of the volcano; it boomed from the rocky floor—it even floated down the length of the infinitely-stretching corridor.

The voice spoke in thunder, yet softly.

Well, Gentlemen?

Krane stared for a second at the woman-thing; then he looked about wildly, trying to find the source of the voice. His head swung back and forth as though it were manipulated by strings from above. "Well, *what?*" he shouted to no one.

Have you realized the truth yet?

"What truth? What are you talking about? Who is that? Is it you?" chimed in Marmorth, bathed in sudden fear.

The corridor shimmered oddly, just behind the stone walls of the volcano.

I'm a voice, Gentlemen. A voice and an illusion. Just an illusion, that's all, Gentlemen. Just an illusion from both of your minds. Made of equal portions of your mind. For you are each as strong as the other.

There was a pause. Marmorth could not speak. Then:

But tell me, have you realized what you should have known before you were foolish enough to enter the corridor?

Krane looked at Marmorth with suspicion. For the first time it seemed to occur to him that perhaps this was a trick on the other's part. Marmorth, recognizing the glance, shrugged his shoulders eloquently.

He found his voice. "No! Tell us, then! *What* should we have known?"

The only real answer as to who is right: which Theorem is the correct one!

"Tell me, tell me!" they shouted, almost together.

There was silence for a moment. The woman-thing ran a scarlet-tipped hand across the hideous lizard snout, as though

searching for a way to phrase what was coming. Then the single word sounded in the heart of the volcano.

Neither.

Krane and Marmorth stared past the woman-thing, stared at each other in confusion. "N-neither?" shouted Marmorth incredulously. "Are you mad? Of course one of us is right! Me!" He was shaking fists at the gruesome being before him. Illusion, perhaps; but an illusion that was goading him.

"Prove it! Prove it!" screamed Krane, stepping forward, flat-footedly, as though seeking to strike the woman-thing.

Then the voice gave them the solution and the proof that neither could contest, for both knew it to be true on a level that defied mere conviction.

You are both egomaniacs. You could not possibly be convinced of the other's viewpoint. Not in a hundred million years. Any message dies between you. You are both too tightly ensnared in yourselves!

The woman-thing suddenly began to shiver. She became indistinct, and there were many shadow-forms of her, surrounding her body like halos. Abruptly, she disappeared from between them—leaving them alone in the quickening darkness of the volcano's throat.

Continued on page 127

Infinity's Choice



by DAMON KNIGHT

In each issue, Mr. Knight will review several new books which he regards as worthy of special consideration.

LIKE HIS FIRST, Philip K. Dick's second novel, *The World Jones Made* (Ace, 35¢), is a spectacular, brim-full grab bag of ideas. The central story concerns a new and fascinating style of conquering villain, but Dick has skilfully woven in such diverse and unlikely elements as (1) a race of artificial mutants, pathetic little goblins brought up in ignorance of their own destiny; (2) the "Drifters"—mindless blobs of protoplasm that float in from space, to become the victims of Dick's savage parody of a pogrom; (3) world peace enforced by "Relativism": "... we say simply: put up or shut up. Prove what you're saying. If you want to say the Jews are the root of all evil—*prove it*. . . . Otherwise, into the work camp.' "

Uniting all this is the central idea, the tyrant who can see the future.

His name is Floyd J. Jones. When he first appears in the story, he's a sideshow performer, an ugly, sullen, disappointed young man with a talent nobody wants. No, not even a talent—a curse. To Jones, the future, one year ahead, is always more vivid than the present. The real horror of this peculiar kind of limited precognition does not appear till the end of the book, and had better remain Dick's secret; but here's a sample:

"... It's not so much like I can see the future; it's more that I've got one foot stuck in the past. I can't shake it loose. I'm retarded; I'm reliving one year of my life forever." He shuddered. "Over and over again. Everything I do, everything I say, hear, experience, I have to grind over twice." He raised his voice, sharp and anguish-

ed, without hope. "I'm living the same life two times!"

"In other words," Cussick said slowly, "for you, the future is static. Knowing about it doesn't make it possible for you to change it."

Jones laughed icily. "Change it? It's totally fixed. It's more fixed, more permanent, than this wall." Furiously, he slammed his open palm against the wall behind him. "You think I've some kind of emancipation. Don't kid yourself... the less you know about the future the better off you are. You've got a nice illusion; you think you have free will."

This is startling enough, but it's only the beginning. One of the characteristic jolts you get from a Dick novel is the shock of falling through an apparently simple idea. . . .

Another is the shock of recognition. In a field noted for cardboard characters, Dick's people are bitterly, sharply, unforgettably real. Jones himself is no stereotyped dictator; he's as intensely irritating as the boss's brother-in-law, or the slob who keeps bothering you in the elevator. You'll hate and pity him: he's *real*. So is Cussick, the Fedgov security agent, and so (incredibly) is his blonde young wife. When their marriage

comes apart, it isn't just a mechanical turn of the plot; it's painful, it hurts you. As in *Solar Lottery*, Dick has made his future world a distorted mirror-image of our own. The distortion is what makes it science fiction: but the image is what strikes home.

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Dragon In the Sea, by Frank Herbert (Doubleday, \$2.95) is the *Astounding* serial (published as "Under Pressure") that tells the story of the sub tug *Fenian Ram* and her oil-raiding mission into enemy-held Arctic waters. The story suffers, I think, somewhat from the same paradox that gives some spaceship stories a pedestrian quality: the ocean is a fascinating place, but when you're in a sub, you can't see it. Against this, however, Herbert has brought up an almost frightening arsenal of competence. His atomic submarine is immensely detailed and convincing: the problems that confront her crew during the voyage are technical ones, and are solved technically, often after episodes of great suspense. In addition to the problem of the sub tug's survival (all of the last twenty raiders have been caught and destroyed by the enemy), Herbert has introduced three internal problems: (1) Ramsey, the book's protagonist, is a Bureau of Psychology man,

ordered aboard to spy on (2) the *Ram's* captain, Sparrow, who is believed to be a borderline psychotic; and (3) as if that weren't enough, there's evidence that an enemy agent is aboard.

Curiously, all three of these promising threads seem to trail off into correct but unexciting ends: the enemy spy is duly unmasked, but it hardly seems to matter which of the commonplace *Ram* crewmen he turns out to be; the captain's survival-linked "psychotic" adaptation to his undersea life is duly explained, like an interesting textbook problem; the hero's masquerade ends by degrees, and never seems vitally important. These are quibbles, though: the real story is the fascinating one of the *Ram* herself. Those who insist on pure science fiction will find here a fit companion piece for Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity*; and there's no higher praise than that.

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S-F, the Year's Greatest Science-Fiction and Fantasy, is only the first, I trust, of an annual series of Dell 35¢ anthologies to be edited by Judith Merril. (Gnome is publishing a hard-bound edition which I haven't yet seen.) Something of this kind has been badly needed: an authoritative, perceptive, organized collection of the year's best,

at a price everyone can afford.

Readers of Miss Merril's previous anthologies already know that her taste is unfaltering. Five of the eighteen stories in this one seem to me unimprovable—Avram Davidson's masterly (and howlingly funny) "The Golem" from (*F&SF*), Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s "The Hooper" (from *Fantastic Universe*), Algis Budrys' "Nobody Bothers Gus" (*ASF*), Shirley Jackson's wonderful "One Ordinary Day, With Peanuts" (*F&SF*), and Isaac Asimov's "Dreaming Is a Private Thing" (*F&SF*). Leaving my own entry out of account (not for modesty's sake but the lack of it), there are seven more stories—by Robert Abernathy, E. C. Tubb, Willard Marsh, Mildred Clingerman, Kuttner-&Moore, R. R. Merliss and Steve Allen—eminently good enough to repay you if there were nothing better in the book. There are five more which I mildly dislike, but always for personal reasons of interest and taste. Mark Clifton's psi story, "Sense From Thought Divide," although well written, seems to me to demonstrate the hollowness of this much-touted subject; Sturgeon's "Bulkhead" has an over-emotional quality which somewhat repels me (but his very similar "Twink" made me want to bawl, so take your choice); Jack Finney's "Of

Missing Persons" has a disappointingly trite ending; Zenna Henderson's "Pottage" and James Gunn's "The Cave of Night" seem over-familiar; but I can't say that any is bad.

Taken all together, the eighteen stories (and the eighty honorable mentions listed in the back of the book) give an intriguing picture of science fiction, 1955. The spread of subjects is rather small; there are six space stories, three about robots or androids, two each about psi phenomena and supermen, and a scattering of others—but no cataclysm stories, no dangerous inventions, no time travel. The range of periods is correspondingly short: one story takes place in the past, the rest either in the present or the comparatively near future.

In spite of the light touch which may seem to dominate the book ("The Golem," "Junior," "The Ethicators" and a couple of others), the one thing most of these stories have in common is their tragic mood. Miss Merrill worked hard to keep this from overbalancing the collection, I know—one of the year's best but most dismal stories had to be jettisoned on that account—and yet all but seven of the stories which were finally chosen give a dominant impression of sadness. This is true even of stories with conventional happy

endings, such as "The Stutterer."

I have the feeling that, in spite of itself, science fiction is pulling in its horns. In these stories, we are visited three times by beings from elsewhere, but our own far traveling is limited to wistful glimpses of distant worlds (in "The Stutterer," the other planet is merely another battleground and in "Of Missing Persons" it is a wonderful but unattainable colony). The flow of technological marvels has dried up. Of the eleven stories which make some use of the familiar "world of tomorrow" background, only one—Asimov's—explores the consequences of a new invention; the rest merely postulate the usual equipment, spaceships, robots or what have you, and go on from there.

In the space stories, the sense of destination is lacking. Sturgeon's "Bulkhead" takes place in a spaceship, but it might just as well have been a psychoanalyst's broom closet. Gone is the exuberance with which, in the thirties, writers peopled far planets with fascinatingly cock-eyed life forms. Modern astronomy is no doubt partly responsible for this, but certainly there has been a change of mood among the writers, too. There was a certain light-heartedness in the way prewar writers used

to destroy the Earth by solar flares, invasions, earthquakes or inundation; but stories like "The Hoofer" and "The Cave of Night" seem to suggest the author's feeling that nothing so fortunate is likely to happen.

I am far from wishing to suggest that all this is evidence of the desperate plight of our times; on the contrary, science fiction was never more romantic and outward-looking than in the Depression years. What it does prove, if anything, is the desperate (and traditional) plight of writers. Another trend toward uniformity which Miss Merrill had to combat was that in which the story's persecuted hero represents the writer himself, squeezed between a machine civilization and the demands of his art; and at least six such writers got themselves into the book in various disguises.

It's of more interest, perhaps, to note that in this year when the Boom collapsed, although many of the best old-guard writers were absent from the field, a lot of brilliant new talent was coming up. If I read the signs rightly, half a dozen of the bright young men represented here will be back next year—and that should be a collection to watch for.

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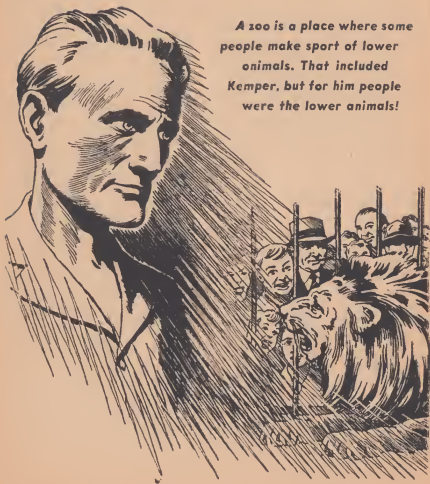
WILLIS F. BRADLEY's new translation of *Journey To the Center of the Earth*, by Jules Verne (Ace, 35¢) was a very pleasant surprise to me. I read *The Mysterious Island* when I was in my early teens, and loved it; but I was reading Dickens then, too, and Dumas, and all manner of unwieldy stuff that I wouldn't dare tackle today.

Probably what happened, on top of the inoculation against literature I got in school, was that Verne got mixed up in my mind with George Melies' primitive motion picture of the Earth-Moon story. If the same thing has happened to any of you, you may be glad to hear that Verne isn't creaky and awkward in the slightest—not in this translation, anyhow. The story, which concerns a descent through an extinct Icelandic volcano into a Pellucidar-like world, has very little "plot" by the usual standards: that is, no villain, no love interest (the hero has a girl, but she gets left behind), no gunfights, no kidnappings; but Verne fills it up so adroitly with spectacle, with palatable background, characterization and humor, that it's continuously interesting and a great deal of fun to read.

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The Man Who Liked Lions

A zoo is a place where some people make sport of lower animals. That included Kemper, but for him people were the lower animals!



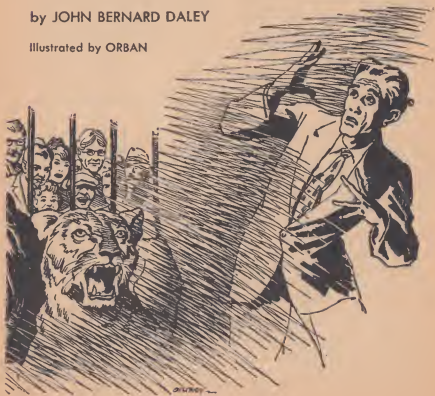
MR. KEMPER leaned on the rail, watching the caged lions asleep in the August sun. At his side a woman lifted a whimpering little girl to her shoulder and said, "Stop that! Look at the lions!" Then she jiggled the girl up and down. The lion opened yellow eyes, lifted his head from between his paws and yawned. Immediately the

girl put her fingers over her face and began to cry. "Shut up!" said the woman. "You shut up right now or I'll tell that big lion to eat you up!" Looking through her fingers the girl said, "Lions don't eat little girls." The woman shook her. "Of course they do! I said they did, didn't I?"

"Lions seldom eat people," said Mr. Kemper. With all of

by JOHN BERNARD DALEY

Illustrated by ORBAN



her two hundred pounds the woman turned to face him. "Well!" she said. The word hung like an icicle in the warm air, but Mr. Kemper waved it aside. "Only old lions resort to human flesh. Except for the famous incident of the Tsavo man-eaters, of course." The woman pulled her arm tighter around the girl, elbow up, as if to ward him off. "Come on, Shirl," she said. "Let's go look at the taggers." And with a warning look over her shoulder she lunged away from the rail. A big man with an unlit cigarette in his mouth took her place.

As her wide back swayed down the walk, Mr. Kemper wondered if she had a special intuition about him, like dogs, whose noses warned them that he was not quite the kind of man they were accustomed to. Women, particularly those with children, seemed to feel that way. He watched her leave, having decided that she was unsuited for what he had in mind.

Two things happened simultaneously, interrupting his thoughts. The big man beside him tapped him on the shoulder and asked him for a match; at the same time Kemper saw, just beyond the retreating woman, a man in a tweed jacket and gray slacks, watching him. For a second they stared at each other and Kemper felt a mind-probe dart

swiftly against his shield. He tightened the shield and waited. The man was heavily tanned, like Kemper, with unusually wide eyes and a dolichocephalic head. He had remarkable cheekbones; they appeared to slant forward toward the middle of his face, which was very narrow and long in the jaw. He looked a lot like Mr. Kemper, the way one Caucasian looks like another to an Eskimo. His glance swerved from Kemper to the lion cage; then he turned his back, a little too casually. Breath hissed softly from between Mr. Kemper's teeth.

THE BIG MAN said, "Hey, buddy, I asked do you have a match?"

"What? No, I don't smoke." His thoughts racing, he faced the lion cage. The tanned man had turned away, obviously not wanting to contact him, but why? He knew who Kemper was; there was no doubt of that. Frowning slightly, Mr. Kemper looked at the chewed hunks of horsemeat and bone on the cage floor, and the vibrating flies. The only logical answer was that the man was waiting for reinforcements. Even now he was probably contacting the Three Councils. Still, that gave Kemper a reasonable chance; it took a while for even the most powerful minds to move along the pathways of

JOHN BERNARD DALEY spent three years teaching technical writing and English composition at the University of Pittsburgh. But, he says, "you seldom find stories with life in them in classrooms and English offices." His present post of technical editor is livelier and gives him more time to write. It was science fiction that inspired him to begin, and this is his second published s-f story. We think you'll join us in hoping that there will be more.

time. Beside him the big man was talking again. "You feel okay, pal? You looked kind of far away there all of a sudden. Maybe you oughta go over in the shade."

"Not at all. I was only thinking of something."

"Yeah?" The man took the cigarette from his mouth and put it in his shirt pocket. "Say, I heard you telling that broad there lions don't eat people. You sure about that?"

"Quite sure. Look at them. Do you think they need to depend on anything as slow as Homo Sapiens for food?" With another part of his brain he wondered how many men would be sent to take him back. There was one point in his favor, however. He had nothing to lose.

"I don't know, pal. All I ever see them do is sleep. Always laying on their fat backs, like now."

"Well, that's not unusual. Lions sleep in the daytime and hunt at night."

"Yeah? What the hell good is that? The zoo closes at 5:30, don't it?"

Kemper looked at him dispassionately. He thought: "You fool, what would you say if you knew that you were talking to a man who hunted your ape ancestors through the forests of a million years ago? Could your pigmy brain accept that?"

The man jabbed him on the shoulder again. "Look at that big one with the black streaks in his hair. Ain't he something? Why don't he jump around in there like the chimps do?"

"Maybe he doesn't know it's expected of him," Kemper answered, hoping that the arrival of the man in the tweed jacket would not affect his sport of the moment.

"You know, I'd like to see a couple of those babies mixing it up. Like the lion against the tiger, maybe. Who do you think would win a hassle like that, anyway?"

"The lion," Mr. Kemper said. He decided that the game would go on; an idea was beginning to scratch at the corners of his mind. Looking around with what he hoped was a conspiratorial

air, he jabbed his elbow into the big man's stomach. "Listen, you'd like to see some action, would you? Suppose you be here in say—two hours. At three o'clock."

"Yeah? What kind of action? You ain't trying to kid me, are you, buddy?"

Shrugging, Mr. Kemper looked at the flies swarming in the cage. "It's just a tip. Take it or leave it, buddy." He turned, brushed by the scowling man, and left the rail. Although it was getting hotter he walked down the cement in the sun, avoiding the shade of the tall hedges opposite the row of cages. He went toward the stairway that lifted from the lion court to the terrace where the central zoo building stood. Behind the building was the main enclosure; the zoo itself was terraced along two hill-sides, with more hills in the distance. It was not a large zoo, nor was it a good place to hide. But Mr. Kemper did not intend to hide.

In the cages he passed were other cats: cheetahs, leopards, puma and tigers, lying with heaving flanks, or lolling red-tongued on the stone floors. They hadn't changed too much, he decided, except in size. Even the streak-maned lion was puny in comparison with the lions that Kemper had known. He walked up to the drinking fountain by the stair-

way, the sun in his face. He was almost tempted to stare contemptuously up at it. Bending over the fountain he caught the dusty smell of the cats among popcorn, rootbeer and ice cream smells and the sweat stink of people. He straightened, wiping his lips, and remembered the somber jungles of the Pliocene, black-green in the sun that was a fist against your head; the plains of javelin-tall, yellow grass swinging to the horizon; and in the hills the lions with hides like hammered brass, the deadly, roaring lions. He remembered too, with the smell of those lions thick as dust in his mouth, the cities of his people, the proud people who had discovered the secrets of time through the science of their minds, a science unknown to the world he was in now. He looked up slowly and saw the man in the tweed jacket standing at the top of the stairway.

When their eyes met, Kemper probed with an arrow-swift thought but the other had his mind-shield up. The man turned, and moved behind a group of women. The man was gone when Kemper got to the top of the steps. "So that's the way you want it," he said, looking around. Two sidewalks led from the stair top; one went up the hill to the aviary, the other around the south wing of the building. He

took the one that rounded the wing. "I doubt," he said, "if we'll play peek-a-boo all afternoon, however." An old lady twitching along the walk gave him a nasty look as he passed.

HE WENT by the zebra corral where a small boy was picking up stones and turned into the side entrance of the wing. He went down the dim corridor, turned left at the men's room, then right and left again, and came finally to a small yard partially hidden from the main enclosure by an extension of the wing. In the yard was only one exhibit, a beaver pool surrounded by a waist-high stone wall. Two teen-aged boys sprawled on the wall; otherwise the place was deserted. Mr. Kemper studied the boys. Here was game to his liking. He went over and sat down on a bench in the sun.

The boys, twins in levis, saddle-shoes, T-shirts and long hair, leaned over the pool. There was something odd about the actions of the blond one who tilted dangerously near the water. He moved, spasmodically, and Mr. Kemper saw the flicker of sunlight on the long stick held like a spear in his hand, and heard a splash. Cursing, the boy pushed himself upright and dropped from the wall, shaking water from the stick. "You missed," said the other one.

"I'll show that flat-tailed rat," said the blond boy. From a back pocket he took a clasp-knife and snapped it open, and from a side pocket a length of twine. With swift, vicious twists he started to tie the knife-handle to the end of the stick. He made two knots and said, "Man, look at that. That'll hold it, man."

"What about the cat on the bench over there? What if he sees us?"

"Him? So what if he does? We can handle him. Anyway, he's got his eyes shut, ain't he?"

The sun tingled on the tops of Mr. Kemper's ears as he listened, his eyes half-shut. "Okay, give me lots of room on the wall," the blond boy said. There was a rasping of cloth on stone. Then Mr. Kemper closed his eyes and made a picture in the darkness of his mind, a small, bright picture that he blotted out immediately after it was formed. By the pool, metal clattered on stone.

The blond boy yelled, "Hey, what'd you shove me for? Look what you did!"

"Me? I never touched you, you jerk!"

"The hell you didn't. Look at that damn knife!"

Opening his eyes, Mr. Kemper looked at the pieces of knife blade scattered at the boy's feet and, a little to one side, the broken stick. He smiled and settled back on the bench, listening

to the argument. The boys shouted and waved their arms, but that was all. As for their invective, he felt it lacked originality; he tired of it quickly. He got up from the bench and walked toward them. The argument stopped.

They looked at him with cold arrogant eyes. "Hello," he said.

They looked away. "You hear something, man?" said the blond boy.

"Not a thing, Jack, not a thing," the other answered.

The smile on Mr. Kemper's face was his best, his friendliest; it had taken him hours of practice in front of mirrors. "*Apes, your fathers were not arrogant when they died screaming on our spears. They were not bold when our hunting cats ripped their bellies.*" Aloud he said, "You know, I'm a stranger around here and I thought you might be able to help me. Just what is it that's going on at the lion cage at three o'clock today?"

"We ain't heard nothing about no lion's cage, dad. We got our own troubles."

"Yeah, our own troubles. Get lost, dad."

"It sounded very interesting, something about a big hassle in the cages."

The boys lifted their eyebrows and looked sidelong at each other. The blond one said, "I told you to get lost, dad. Take

five. You know, depart away from here."

Mr. Kemper said, "Well, thanks anyway," and was still smiling as he left them.

IT WAS hotter when he reached the main enclosure, but still cool by his standards. At a refreshment stand he ordered a hot dog with mustard. As he waited, leaning against the counter, he saw the man in the tweed jacket among a group of people walking toward the elephant yard. He paid for the hot dog, picked it up, and walked along the path, keeping the jacket in sight.

The man in tweed went by the elephants, past the giraffes and the zebras, then around the south wing of the building. Up the walk toward the aviary he went, with Kemper not too far behind. At the top of the hill the man stopped in front of the aviary. It was a wide enclosure fenced by bars thirty feet high. In the larger section were the myriad ducks, cranes, gulls and other harmless birds; walled off from these were eagles, vultures, and condors squatting on carved balconies. From the hilltop there was a fine view of the zoo grounds below. The man in the tweed jacket turned, apparently to look down the hill, but instead looked squarely at Mr. Kemper standing a few feet away.

Neither of them said anything. The man in tweed seemed embarrassed. Mr. Kemper took a bite of the hot dog and chewed reflectively. After a while he said, "I suppose I ought to recognize you, but I don't. Council of Science, no doubt."

The man answered stiffly: "Ulbasar, of the First Science Council. Lord Kjem, you are under arrest."

"You'd better use words; it's less liable to make anyone suspicious. You might have dressed a little more intelligently, too."

Ulbasar ran his hand over his jacket lapels. "But it's cold. How do you stand it in that light shirt?"

"Very simple; I'm wearing long underwear."

"Well, you've obviously been here much longer than I have."

"Yes," said Kemper. "I've been here quite a while."

They didn't speak again for several minutes. In front of them some girls pressed against the mesh screen that reinforced the bars, eyeing a pompous small duck. "Let's go," said one of the girls. "These birds are too disgusting. I mean, they're so ugly!"

"She thinks the birds are ugly," said Mr. Kemper. Laughing, he turned to Ulbasar. "Well, what do you think of the scavenging little ape of our marshland now?"

Ulbasar shook his head. "In-

credible. Thoroughly incredible."

Mr. Kemper said, "Look at them. They laugh at the birds, they laugh at the monkeys; I have even seen some of them laughing at the lions." He scanned the people at the bars, the sweaty men with crooked noses, sagging bellies, bald heads and hairy arms. There were women in shorts, gray women whose legs pillared up to fearsome, rolling buttocks; girls with smeared mouths and rough-shaven legs and sandals strapped across their fat, wiggling toes. "The females are unbelievable," Kemper said, "but you should see the children."

He finished his hot dog and wiped his hands on his handkerchief. "Well, Ulbasar, where are the others?"

"Others? There are no others. I came alone."

Kemper, his eyes on the people at the cage, slowly folded his handkerchief. Without warning he flung the full force of his mind-probe at the man beside him. Ulbasar staggered and lurched to his left, throwing out a desperate block that was contemptuously brushed aside. Kemper reached out, gripped his arm, then eased the power of the probe. "Don't lie to me," he said softly. "It will take more than one of you to force me to go back; you know that. Now, where are the others?"

"Only one other," said Ulbasar, shaking his head. "Lord Gteris. He's on his way. None of the rest were close enough to contact."

"That's better. So they sent Gteris, eh? It's been a long time since Gteris and I hunted together, a very long time." He looked up as the condor on the highest perch spread its wings and cocked its head toward the wire mesh roof of the cage.

Words burred from Ulbasar, who still looked shaken. "The Nobles demanded that Lord Gteris come. The Science Council insisted that only our men handle it, and they're considerably agitated. There's been open conflict between Nobles and Scientists at the Sessions, and the tribunal is worried. They want you returned, and they want you returned quickly."

"Politics, always politics," said Kemper, letting loose his grip on Ulbasar's arm.

"The Scientists are putting a lot of pressure on the tribunal. They feel there's danger to us each moment you spend here in the future. They're worried about the time-pattern."

"That's ridiculous. How can a man from the past affect the future? Besides, it isn't our future; it belongs to the ape-people."

"I know, but that makes no difference."

"I've been to their libraries.

There are no records of us, unless you count some foolish legends of continents sinking in the sea." He looked at a man a few feet away who was throwing popcorn at a gull. A piece of popcorn bounced off the gull's head, and the man laughed. People standing nearby laughed too, and the man pitched more popcorn. Sighing, Kemper looked at his wrist watch. "When is he coming?"

"I don't know, precisely, and that's the truth."

Kemper thought about it. It would take a while. After Gteris arrived there would be important details to occupy him, such as assimilating the manners and mores of this era and getting proper clothing. He said, "When he comes you'll have no trouble finding me. I won't leave the grounds; I give my word."

"The word of a renegade and a fugitive?" Ulbasar was himself again.

"The word of a Noble," said Kemper, turning away from him coldly.

"One thing more, Lord Kjem," Ulbasar said. "The time rift. We have orders to go back with you along the rift you used, making certain that you seal it behind us. Is it close by?"

"That I will tell you when I have to," said Kemper, turning completely around this time and walking away.

ULBASAR would keep close watch on him, he knew, until Gteris came. That they intended to make him close his time rift made sense; the rift was dangerous to the over-all pattern. When he had left hastily he had forced his way through time with his mind-matrix, knowing that pursuit would have been swift if he had taken one of the normal time paths. The rift he had made was obvious, but would respond to no one but him. Others could accompany him through it, however, as he led the way. Gteris and Ulbasar could go with him and, controlling his mind, make him close the rift behind him.

So he walked briskly, knowing he had much to do in an uncertain amount of time. The sun was higher, pale in the glazed sky. Disheveled, harassed-looking people passed him, sweat stains dark on their clothes, and with them were fretful children. Mr. Kemper walked, and the people went by him, on their way to laugh at the monkeys, throw stones at the bears, and call "Kitty, kitty, kitty" to the leopards.

At a stand opposite the polar bears, near the north wing of the central building, he stopped to get a cup of coffee, but there was none for sale, so instead he bought a paper cup full of a green drink. He sipped it, watching a big white bear loafing in

the pool. A little to one side of him a young man was arguing with a boy who wanted cotton candy. From below them, and to their right, came a low rumbling. "What's that, Daddy?" said the boy. "It's only the lions roaring," his father answered.

"They're not roaring, actually," said Mr. Kemper. "They're grunting, and clearing their throats."

The boy looked at Mr. Kemper with interest, but his father frowned. "It sounds like roaring to me," he said.

Mr. Kemper smiled at the boy. "Oh no. If the lions were roaring you could hear nothing else. It's a sound you never forget, a sound that rips the wind and shakes the trees with thunder."

"I could forget it, Mac," said the counterman, leaning on his elbows and winking at the boy's father.

"I want to hear the lions roar," the boy said.

"For Pete's sake, what do you want? Make up your mind; do you want lions or cotton candy?" The boy's father looked exasperated.

"If you go to the lion cage at three o'clock today you'll hear them roar," Mr. Kemper said.

Shortly after that the young man dragged away his little boy, who was still insisting he wanted to hear the lions roar. Eventual-

ly, everyone who talked with Mr. Kemper went away rather rather suddenly. Mr. Kemper, unabashed, drank from his paper cup and thought about the ravages of time.

A woman and a man came around the corner of the building that faced the polar bears. The woman was red-faced, her voice a thin rasping. "All you want to do is watch those damn chips. You'd watch those chips all day if I didn't drag you away from there. Chips, chips, I'm sick of chips."

"Chimps," said Mr. Kemper as they went by. "Chimps, not chips. Chimps, lady, with an 'm' in it."

The counterman, moving toward him, wiped the counter with a soggy rag and said, "Listen, Mac, what's all this with the lions?"

Mr. Kemper looked at him. "Oh, do you like lions?"

"Well, it's like this," the counterman said. But he had no chance to finish. There was an animal shriek of pain from the other side of the building. The polar bears lifted their heads. Putting his unfinished drink on the counter, Mr. Kemper went toward the sound.

IN THE high cage that housed the chimpanzees, at the corner of the wing, a chimp swung violently on a trapeze, scolding at

another on the cage floor. Kemper saw that the one on the trapeze was a female, the other a bigger, older male. The male, his face grotesque with anger, climbed the bars and got as close as he could to the trapeze. He hung there, grabbing at the female as she swung past just out of reach. There were only a few people near the cage, but most of them were smiling. One of them, a gangling, tall man, ran about pointing a camera first at the female, then the male. A lean woman, possibly his wife, stood close to him. She put her hand on his arm. When Kemper saw her eyes he moved behind the others and went toward her and the man with the camera, taking a position a little to their right.

"Do it again, Al," the lank woman said. "Make them mad again." Al was sweating. He laughed, looked at the people around him, then pushed black hair from his forehead and handed her the camera. "Okay, okay," he said. "You get the shots now and don't goof it." He moved disjointedly, like a puppet, as close to the cage as he could, directly beneath the periphery of the trapeze's swinging arc.

He started to jiggle, then jumped up and down, making faces at the female. "Chee, chee!" he called. He danced, capering loosely, flapping long arms against his thighs. "Haaah,

haaah, haaah," he yelled. "Haaah! Aargh!"

Angered, the female chattered at him. When the trapeze swung to the top of its arc she leaped and caught the cage bars, then dropped down them until she was only a few feet above the capering man. She screeched at him, pounding one hand against a bar, and the spectators laughed. On the opposite side of the cage the male chimp dropped to the floor and scuttled toward her. Stopping beneath her, he lifted his arms and growled low in his throat. She turned, snarling, and began to climb bars. With a last wild screech at the shouting, dancing man outside the cage she jumped, just as the male's fingers brushed her foot. Far over his head she went, then thumped to the floor. He dropped, and ran after her. She was climbing toward the trapeze again when he caught her. He sidled in, cuffing at her, then they grappled. A scream split the air as his teeth sank into her shoulder. Added now to the smells of popcorn, sweat and cotton candy was the smell of blood.

There was quiet in the cage and out of it as the female backed away from the hunched male. Unmolested, she climbed the bars slowly and swung to the trapeze, where she sat with one hand held to her bleeding shoulder. On the floor of the cage the

male lifted both arms to her.

The spectators breathed again. "Did you get it?" said Al. "Did you? What a shot! Terrific, but terrific!"

"I got it, Al, I got it!" his wife said, eyes shining.

Mr. Kemper grinned at Al and shook his head admiringly. "Say, that was quite a performance." Still breathing hard, Al shoved his hair out of his eyes and returned the grin.

"Oh, Al's great," his wife said. "You ought to see him sometime at a party."

Mr. Kemper said, "He certainly does have talent."

"Ah, it's nothing," Al said. "Nothing to it, fella. You sure you got those shots, Baby?"

Moving closer, Mr. Kemper lowered his voice. "Listen, would you like to get some really terrific shots? Ones you'd remember all your life?"

Al looked at him. "Yeah. Shots of what?"

"Be at the lion cage at three o'clock. You'll never have a chance like this again, believe me."

"Sure, sure, but shots of what, friend?"

So Mr. Kemper bent his head and whispered to him, and as he did he saw the gleam start deep in Al's eyes and swell to the pale surfaces. But Al's eyes didn't gleam the way his wife's did. And after a while Mr. Kemper

left them, and the cage that was silent except for the slow creaking of the trapeze.

After looking at his watch Mr. Kemper walked faster. The sun dropped in the sticky sky and there was only a faint wind. And for the next hour or so Mr. Kemper was here, there and everywhere. If there was a bunch of little boys shouting at the rhinoceros, then Mr. Kemper was there, smiling and nodding. When a party of college students stood making dirty jokes about the baboons, there too was Mr. Kemper, eventually saying something that made everyone stare at him.

He was ubiquitous. He was with the people who craned their necks at the giraffes, and the ones who laughed at the sleek sea lions darting in their narrow troughs. He was with a family watching the anacondas drooping in green cubicles; he was at the bison corral; he saw the crocodile, the yak and the blesbok. And always, wherever he was, he had a few words to say about the lions. And time passed.

IT WAS exactly three o'clock when he stood again at the top of the stairway above the lion court. A lot of people were milling and shoving in front of the cages, a noisy crowd that made the lions nervous. They were awake now, pacing their cells, and the leop-

ards were awake, and the jaguars. In the center cage the streak-maned lion put his head to the floor and coughed. Behind him the lioness waited, tense. The lion curved a paw around one of the bars and some of the people clapped their hands. Others whistled; several looked at their watches. Kemper, who was starting to smile again, watched the crowd. There was Al, his camera, and his wife, close to the center cage. The two teen-aged boys were near them. The little boy and his father were there, and many others that Mr. Kemper was glad to see. Hands clasped behind him, he stood looking down on them. Suddenly he felt powerful bonds clamp onto his mind.

Turning slowly around he saw Ulbasar walking down the hill toward him, a tall man at his side. They stopped in front of him, their faces dark in the sun. "Here he is," said Ulbasar. The tall man at his left made the greeting sign of one Noble to another. "Lord Kjem," he said. Returning the sign, Mr. Kemper said, "Lord Gteris."

Gteris said, "I hate to do this; you know that. We were friends once. I hope you won't try to resist."

"I told Ulbasar I wouldn't. Together you're considerably stronger than I am. I'd be a fool to try anything."

"That's smart of you," said Gteris. "Now let's get to business. Ulbasar says you wouldn't tell him the location of your time rift. Is this true?"

"Certainly. Does a Noble answer to a Scientist? But of course I'll tell you, Gteris. The time rift is down there, behind the hedge opposite the lion cage."

All signs of friendliness left Gteris's face. He spun and gave orders. "Ulbasar, you heard him. Go down there and see if he's telling the truth. I'll stand guard over him. And keep the mind-block tight."

Ulbasar nodded, and went down the steps. Mr. Kemper tested the vise that pressed against his mind; it held much too well. Gteris was looking at him reproachfully. "Really, Kjem, yours is conduct unbecoming a Noble. If you had to murder somebody why did it have to be a Scientist? And then all this forcing your own rift into the time-pattern. The Nobles are unhappy with you, Kjem."

"You know, I don't regret any of it," said Mr. Kemper, watching Ulbasar moving close to the crowd by the cages. "Tell me, how's the hunting back home?"

"Not too bad; I got some fine hawks a while back. I still wish I could handle cats the way you do, instead of—what's wrong with that crowd in front of the cage down there?"

Mr. Kemper said, "It's past three o'clock."

Below them a big man pushed through the crowd toward Ulbasar, shouting, "There's the guy told me to be here! There's the faker!" Ulbasar hesitated, looked around, and stopped. The big man caught Ulbasar's shoulder, and jabbed a finger against his chest. The crowd moved toward them.

Gteris said, "He's in trouble."

"He's as good as dead right now," Kemper said.

Gteris stared down at the crowd, then at Kemper. Swiftly he shot a warning thought to Ulbasar, who caught it. As he did the pressure eased slightly from Kemper's mind. It was enough. Kemper lashed out against Gteris' block. They stood there, minds twisting in combat. Then as Ulbasar was hemmed in by the crowd his support weakened, and Gteris fought alone. Slowly, but inexorably he was forced back and out, and Kemper's mind went free. Gteris' face was haggard. "Good gods, Kjem!" he said. "Look at Ulbasar!"

"You can still help him. I'm not holding you."

Gteris looked wildly at him, then ran, bounding down the steps two at a time. He ran toward the crowd and began shouting at Ulbasar. Kemper saw the concentration on his face and knew he was trying to control the

crowd. It was then that Mr. Kemper closed his eyes.

First he shut out the world around him: The dim sun on his ears, the smells of dusty summer and popcorn, the sounds of the small wind and the people. In the blackness of his mind he saw the lion court; each bar of the cage and the yellow lions inside it; the crowd and the two dark men. Then he made a picture of the bars loosening at the top of the cage and the bottom, and the entire section of the cage front sliding ponderously sideways.

There was no sound anywhere. Then below him rang a gonging of steel on cement and after that, the screaming, and over all of it, dwarfing the yells and the echoing clangs, came a roar that ripped the wind and shook the trees with thunder.

HIS EYES still closed, Kemper loosened the fronts of all the cages, one by one. After that he put all his mind to directing the lions. To Ulbasar he gave a quick death. Gteris he singled

out for a special favor; he sent the streak-maned lion at him. As the lion crouched, Gteris stood unmoving, covering his face with his hands. "Stand and fight!" Kemper shouted. "At least die like a Noble!" But Gteris did not move, and the lion sprang. Kemper laughed, the old excitement of the hunt surging in him as he sent the cats leaping and clawing. He made sure that a special few of the ape-people died very slowly. In the distance a siren wailed.

Kemper did not hear the rushing sounds behind and above him. When he did, he called the lions to him, desperately. He looked up at the condors, hurtling like javelins, and behind them the eagles. And he knew why Gteris, the hunter of condors and eagles, had not tried to hold off the lions. Then the condors smashed down.

The streak-maned lion came to him, but it was too late. Mr. Kemper lay dying in the cold sun with the smell of lions like dust in his throat. ∞ ∞





GUEST EDITORIAL

by ROBERT RANDALL

For this issue, we depart from our usual policy of reprinting material from fanzines to present a speech written for the Westercon, an annual West Coast science-fiction convention, by Robert Randall. Randall, who has already been billed as the writing discovery of 1956, is actually two people, both of them familiar to readers of INFINITY: Robert Silverberg and Randall Garrett. The speech, which represents their combined views, was actually delivered by Mr. Garrett. We're publishing it here because, to a large extent, it represents the views of the editors of INFINITY, too. The Westercon, incidentally, is probably the largest national convention to be held regularly every year. This year's, the ninth, was held on June 30 and July 1, in Oakland, California, with Richard Matheson as guest of honor. Mr. Randall was only "one" of 30 or more professional people who attended.

THE QUESTION has been asked: "What is the general state of the science fiction field today, from a writer's viewpoint?"

As a reasonably successful writing team, we think we're reasonably well-qualified to answer this. I use the qualifying adverb twice for good reason—anybody who claims to be an expert in this field is kidding himself, no matter how long he's been in it.

By the way, some of you may wonder why this talk was billed under a pen name while only one of us is doing the talking. Well, we tried giving it in tandem, but we got lost. Alternating words didn't work, either, so here I am.

Anyway, what is the state of the field today? As far as we, personally, can say, it's doing very well. Nobody is getting filthy rich writing—or, for that matter, editing or publishing science fiction. But no one ever

did. No one asks more than a comfortable living.

Science-fiction magazines are based, primarily, on personalities. Each magazine has its own, and it is distinctly different from the others. That means that, as writers, we have to study the personality.

Every successful editor not only has his own ideas as to what science fiction is, but he knows how to present his ideas to the people he has selected as his audience. And "selected" is exactly what I mean. Editors, like writers, not only have something they want to say, but they have a certain group they want to say them to. One editor wants to talk to technicians, another to the *literati*, and so on.

Now, what does this mean to the writer? It means he has to slant. That word, "slant," by the way, has been much misused.

It does not mean that you sit down to the typewriter and say: "Well, what the hell, I guess I'll write a novelette for *Flabbergasting Stories*. They've been doing a lot of mutant stories lately—guess I'll do a story about a guy who gets hit by a stream of neutrons, so his son..."

Not unless you're collecting rejection slips to paper your wall.

"Slanting" is simply getting

an idea, figuring out the best way to handle it, and then aiming it for the particular magazine that you think will appreciate it the most. Of course you make mistakes. What do you want? Egg in your beer?

A lot of people have been complaining lately that modern writers don't have the old "sense of wonder," and they blame it on this very business of slanting—among other things.

Everybody has their own "Golden Age" that they point to and say: "Now, *them* was the good old days. Gee! I really got a kick outa them stories! Stories are interesting now, but they ain't got that kick any more."

All right, chums—examine yourselves. When did you feel that "sense of wonder?" Yeah. *When you first started reading science fiction!*

My own Golden Age was during the late thirties and early forties. Mr. Silverberg admits that his was during the middle and late forties. You can see we're both somewhat younger than, say, Sam Moskowitz. Hugo Gernsback, the Grand Old Man of S-F editors, is sure that the best science fiction was written by Jules Verne and H. G. Wells.

Verne probably liked the works of Cyrano de Bergerac.

"Well, I don't care," says the die-hard, "they just don't print stories like they used to."

Well, no. And scholarly books aren't printed in Latin any more, either. We've lost some of the beauties of Latin, perhaps, but we have gained the beauties of English. We'll just have to get used to it, I guess.

Modern stories aren't aimed at the same audience that they were aimed at in the mid-thirties. For some reason, I can't see modern readers going all goggle-eyed over a television set. The science-fiction extrapolation of the TV is the "visiphone," usually in three-D and color. And I can't see anyone going goggly over that, either.

Anyone who has seen a news-reel shot of a V-2 takeoff isn't going to gasp at the concept of an interstellar space liner. Scientifically, a faster-than-light ship is far beyond present day science, but it doesn't bother anyone to think about it.

Now, for that same reason, I can't see the *characters* in a story "oohing" and "aahing" over the wonders of their day, either. Not unless you specify that they are from way up in the hills somewhere. And a run of futuristic hillbilly stories—I can see it now: "Li'l Abner and the Hell-Stones of Mercury."

Anyone who is financially successful in the science-fiction field has to be able to keep up with what the public wants—that is,

what his particular public wants.

Most editors are doing that today. Those who didn't know what people liked to read fell by the wayside because they couldn't sell their magazines.

The successful ones range widely in age—all the way from John Campbell's *Astounding*, born in 1938, to Larry Shaw's *Infinity*, born in 1955.

Now, please don't somebody jump up and say that *Amazing Stories* is older. The title is older, but the *personality* has changed many times. A good magazine does have personality, and that personality, let's face it, is the editor. *Galaxy* wouldn't be *Galaxy* without Horace Gold, and the same goes for any other successful magazine.

The state of the field, then, depends on the state of the editors in it. And, as of right now, most of the editors are in a pretty good state. New York.

Seriously, most of the men who are guiding today's S-F magazines know what they are doing; they know what they want, and they know what their readers want. And that means that they are able to pay for and demand the stories they want from their authors.

And as long as we can give them the stories they want, everybody, including us, will be happy.



***Maybe you can't change the
present by changing the past—but a
fair exchange is still no robbery . . .***

Illustrated by ENGLE



HOPPER

by ROBERT SILVERBERG



THE warning bell rang, but Quellen left it alone. He was in a mood, and didn't care to break it just to answer the phone.

He continued to rock uneasily back and forth in his pneumo-chair, watching the crocodiles padding gently through the stream's murky waters. After a while the bell stopped ringing. He sat there, joyously passive, sensing about him the warm smell of growing things and the buzzing insect-noises in the air.

That was the only part he didn't like, the constant hum of the ugly insects that whizzed through the calm air. In a way

they represented an invasion; they were symbols of the life he had led before moving up to Class Thirteen. The noise in the air then had been the steady buzz of people, people swarming around in a great hive of a city, and Quellen detested that.

Idly he flipped a stone into the water. "Get it!" he called, as two crocs glided noiselessly toward the disturbance. But the stone sank, sending up black bubbles, and the crocs bumped their pointed noses lightly together and swam away.

He rehearsed the catalogue of his blessings. *Marok*, he thought. *No Marok. No Koll, no Spanner, no Brogg, no Mikken. But especially no Marok.* He sighed, thinking of them all. What a relief to be able to stat out here and not suffer their buzzing voices, not shudder when they burst into his office! And being far from Marok was best of all. No more to worry over his piles of undone dishes, his heaps of books all over the tiny room they shared, his dry, deep voice endlessly talking into the visiphone when Quellen was trying to concentrate.

No. No Marok.

But yet, Quellen thought sadly, yet, the peace he had anticipated when he built his new home had somehow not materialized. For years he had waited with remarkable patience for the day he

reached Class Thirteen and was entitled to live alone. And now that he had encompassed his goal, life was one uneasy fear after another.

He shied another stone into the water.

As he watched the concentric circles of ripples fanning out on the dark surface of the stream, Quellen became conscious of the warning bell ringing again at the other end of the house. The uneasiness within him turned to sullen foreboding. He eased himself out of his chair and headed hurriedly toward the phone.

He switched it on, leaving the vision off. It hadn't been easy to arrange it so that any calls coming to his home, back in Appalachia, were automatically relayed to him here.

"Quellen," he said.

"Koll speaking," was the reply. "Couldn't reach you before. Why don't you turn on your visi, Quellen?"

"It's not working," Quellen said. He hoped sharp-nosed Koll wouldn't smell the lie in his voice.

"Get over here quickly, will you?" Koll said. "Spanner and I have something urgent to take up with you. Got it, Quellen?"

"Yes, sir. Anything else, sir?" Quellen said limply.

"No. We'll fill you in when you get here." Koll snapped the contact decisively.

Quellen stared at the blank screen for a while, chewing his lip. They *couldn't* have found out. He had everything squared. But, came the insistent thought, they must have discovered Quellen's secret. Why else would Koll send for him so urgently? Quellen began to perspire despite the air-conditioning which kept out most of the fierce Congo heat.

They would put him back in Class Twelve if they found out. Or, more likely, they would bounce him all the way back to Eight. He would spend the rest of his life in a tiny room inhabited by two or three other people, the biggest, smelliest, most unpleasant people they could find.

Quellen took a long look at the green overhanging trees, bowed under the weight of their leaves. He let his eyes rove regretfully over his two spacious rooms, the luxurious porch, the uncluttered view. For a moment, now that everything was just about lost, he almost relished the buzzing of the flies. He took a final sweeping look, and stepped into the stat.

HE EMERGED in the tiny apartment for Class Thirteen Appalachians which everyone thought he inhabited. In a series of swift motions he got out of his lounging clothes and into his business

uniform, removed the *Privacy* radion from the door, and transformed himself from Joe Quellen, owner of an illegal privacy-nest in the heart of an unreported reservation in Africa, into Joseph Quellen CrimeSec, staunch defender of law and order. Then he caught a quick-boat and headed downtown to meet Koll, aching numbly from fear.

They were waiting for him when he entered. Little sharp-nosed Koll, looking for all the world like some huge rodent, was facing the door, sifting through a sheaf of minislips. Spanner sat opposite him at the table, his great bull neck hunched over still more memoranda. As Quellen entered, Koll reached to the wall and flipped the oxy vent, admitting a supply for three.

"Took you long enough," Koll said, without looking up.

"Sorry," Quellen mumbled. "Had to change."

"Whatever we do won't alter anything," said Spanner, as if no one had entered. "What's happened has happened, and nothing we do will have the slightest effect."

"Sit down, Quellen," Koll said. He turned to Spanner. "I thought we'd been through this all before. If we meddle it's going to mix up everything. With almost a thousand years to cover,

we'll scramble the whole framework."

Quellen silently breathed relief. Whatever it was they were concerned about, it wasn't his illegal African hideaway. He looked at his two superiors more carefully, now that his eyes were no longer blurred by fear and anticipation. They had obviously been arguing quite a while. Koll was the deep one, Quellen reflected, but Spanner had more power.

"All right, Koll. I'll even grant that it'll mix up the past. I'll concede that much."

"Well, that's something," the small man said.

"Don't interrupt me. I still think we've got to stop it."

Koll glared at Spanner and Quellen could see that the only reason he was concealing the anger lying just behind his eyes was Quellen's presence. "Why, Spanner, why? If we keep the process going we maintain things as they are. Four thousand of them have gone already, and that's only a drop. Look—here it says that over a million arrived in the first three centuries, and after that the figures kept rising. Think of the population we're losing! It's wonderful! We can't *afford* to let these people stay here, when we have a chance to get rid of them. And when history says that we did get rid of them."

Spanner grunted and looked at the minislips he was holding. Quellen's eyes flicked back from one man to the other.

"All right," Spanner said slowly. "I'll agree that it's nice to keep losing all those prolets. But I think we're being hoodwinked as well. Here's my idea: we have to let it keep going on, you say, or else it'll alter the past. I won't argue the point, since you seem so positive. Furthermore, you think it's a good thing to use this business as a method of reducing population. I'm with you on that too. I don't like overcrowding any more than you do, and I'll admit things have reached a ridiculous state nowadays. But—on the other hand, for someone to be running a time-travel business behind our backs is illegal and unethical and a lot of other things, and he ought to be stopped. What do you say, Quellen? This is your department, you know."

The sudden reference to him came as a jolt. Quellen was still struggling to discover exactly what it was they were talking about. He smiled weakly and shook his head.

"No opinion?" Koll asked sharply. Quellen looked at him. He was unable to stare straight into Koll's hard eyes, and let his gaze rest on the Manager's cheekbones instead. "No opinion, Quellen? That's too bad in-

deed. It doesn't speak well of you."

Quellen shuddered. "I haven't been keeping up with the latest developments in the case. I've been very busy on certain projects that—"

He let his voice trail off. His eager assistants probably knew all about this situation, he thought. *Why didn't I check with Brogg before now?*

"Are you aware that four thousand prolets have vanished into nowhere since the beginning of the year?"

"No, sir. Ah, I mean, of course, sir. It's just that we haven't had a chance to act on it yet." *Very lame, Quellen, very lame,* he told himself. *Of course you don't know anything about it, not when you spend all your time at that pretty little hideaway across the ocean. But Brogg probably knows all about it. He's very efficient.*

"Well, just where do you think they've gone?" Koll asked. "Maybe you think they've all hopped into stats and gone off somewhere to look for work? To Africa, maybe?"

The barb had poison on it. Quellen winced, hiding his reaction as well as he could.

"I have no idea, sir."

"You haven't been reading your history books very well, then, Quellen. Think, man: what was the most important histori-

cal development of the past ten centuries?"

Quellen thought. What, indeed? There was so much, and he had always been weak on history. He began to sweat. Koll casually flipped the oxy up a little higher, in an almost insulting gesture of friendliness.

"I'll tell you, then. It's the arrival of the hoppers. And *this* is the year they're starting out from."

"Of course," Quellen said, annoyed with himself. Everyone knew about the hoppers. Koll's reminder was a pointed slur.

"Someone's developed time travel this year," Spanner said. "He's beginning to siphon the hoppers back to the past. Four thousand unemployed prolets are gone already, and if we don't catch him soon he'll clutter up the past with every wandering workman in the country."

"So? That's just my point," Koll said impatiently. "We know they've already arrived in the past; our history books say so. Now we can sit back and let this fellow distribute our refuse all over the past."

Spanner swivelled around and confronted Quellen. "What do you think?" he demanded. "Should we round up this fellow and stop the departure of the Hoppers? Or should we do as Koll says, and let everything go on?"

"I'll need time to study the case," Quellen said suspiciously. The last thing he wanted to do was be forced into making a judgment in favor of one superior over another.

"I have an idea," Spanner said to Koll. "Why not catch this slyster and get him to turn over his time-travel gadget to the government? Then *we* could run a government service and charge the hoppers a fee to be sent back. It's fine all around—we'd catch our man, the government would have time-travel on a platter, the hoppers would still go back without changing the past, and we'll make a little money on the deal."

Koll brightened. "Perfect solution," he said. "Brilliant, Spanner. Quellen—"

Quellen stiffened. "Yes, sir?"

"Get on it, fast. Track down this fellow and put him away, but not before you get his secret out of him. As soon as you locate him, the government can go into the hopper-exporting trade."

CHAPTER II

ONCE HE was back in his own office, behind his own small but private desk, Quellen could feel important again. He rang for Brogg and Mikken, and the two UnderSecs appeared almost instantly.

"Good to see you again," Brogg said sourly. Quellen open-

ed the vent and let oxy flow into the office, trying to capture the patronizing look Koll had flashed while doing the same thing ten minutes before.

Mikken nodded curtly. Quellen surveyed the two of them. Brogg was the one who knew the secret; a third of Quellen's salary paid him to keep quiet about Quellen's second, secret home. Big Mikken did not know and did not care; he took his orders directly from Brogg, not from Quellen.

"I suppose you're familiar with the recent prolet disappearances," Quellen began.

Brogg produced a thick stack of minislips. "As a matter of fact, I was just going to get in touch with you about them. It seems that four thousand unemployed prolets have vanished so far this year."

"What have you done so far towards solving the case?" asked Quellen.

"Well," Brogg said, pacing up and down the little room and wiping the sweat from his heavy jowls, "I've determined that these disappearances are directly connected to historical records of the appearance of the hoppers in the late Twentieth Century and succeeding years." Brogg pointed to the book lying on Quellen's desk. "History book. I put it there for you. It confirms my findings."

Quellen ran a finger along his jawline and wondered what it was like to carry around as much fat on one's face as Brogg did. Brogg was perspiring heavily, and his face was virtually begging Quellen to open the oxy vent wider. The moment of superiority pleased the CrimeSec, and he made no move toward the wall.

"I've already taken these factors into consideration," said Quellen. "I've developed a course of action."

"Have you checked it with Koll and Spanner?" Brogg said insolently. His jowls quivered as his voice rumbled through them.

"I have," Quellen said with as much force as he could muster, angry that Brogg had so easily deflated him. "I want you to track down the slyster who's shipping these hoppers back. Bring him here. I want him caught before he sends anyone else into the past."

"Yes, sir," Brogg said resignedly. "Come on, Mikken." The other assistant reluctantly left his chair and followed Brogg out. Quellen watched them quizzically through his view-window as they appeared on the street, jostled their way to a belt, and disappeared among the multitudes that thronged the streets. Then, with almost savage joy, he flipped the oxy vent to its widest, and leaned back.

AFTER a while Quellen decided to brief himself on the situation. Conquering his apathy was not easy, since foremost in his mind was the desire to get out of Appalachia and back to Africa as quickly as he could.

He snapped on the projector and the history book began to unroll. He watched it stream by.

The first sign of invasion from the future came about 1960, when several men in strange costumes appeared in the part of Appalachia then known as Manhattan. Records show they appeared with increasing frequency throughout the next decade, and when interrogated all admitted that they had come from the future. Pressure of repeated evidence eventually forced the people of the 20th Century to the conclusion that they were actually being subjected to a peaceful but annoying invasion by time-travellers.

There was more, a whole reel more, but Quellen had had enough. He cut the projector off. The heat of the little room was oppressive, despite the air conditioning and the oxy vent. Quellen looked despairingly at the confining walls, and thought with longing of the murky stream that ran by his African retreat's front porch.

"I've done all I can," he said, and stepped out the window to catch the nearest quickboat back to his Class Thirteen apartment. Fleetinglly he considered the idea of getting Brogg to handle the whole case while he went back to Africa, but he decided that would be inviting disaster.

QUELLEN had neglected to keep his foodstocks in good supply, he discovered, and, since his stay in Appalachia threatened to be long or possibly permanent, he decided to replenish his stores. He fastened the *Privacy* radion to his door again and headed down the twisting fly-ramp to the supply shop, intending to stock up for a long siege.

As he made his way down, he noticed a sallow-looking man heading in the opposite direction up the ramp. Quellen did not recognize him, but that was unsurprising; in the crowded turmoil of Appalachia, one never got to know very many people, just the keeper of the supply shop and a handful of neighbors.

The sallow-looking man stared curiously at him and seemed to be saying something with his eyes. He brushed against Quellen and shoved a wadded minislip into his hand. Quellen unfolded it after the other had disappeared up the flyramp, and read it.

Out of work? See Lanoy.

That was all it said. Instantly Quellen's CrimeSec facet came into play. Like most law-breakers in public office, he was vigorous in prosecution of other law-breakers, and there was something in Lanoy's handbill that smacked of illegality. Quellen turned with the thought of pursuing the hastily-retreating sal-low man, but the other had disappeared. He could have gone almost anywhere after leaving the flyramp. *Out of work? See Lanoy.* Quellen wondered who Lanoy was and what his magic remedy was. He made up his mind that he would have Brogg look into the matter.

Carefully stowing the minislip in his pocket, Quellen entered the supply shop. The red-faced little man who ran it greeted Quellen with an unusual display of heartiness.

"Oh, it's the CrimeSec! We haven't been honored by you in a long time, CrimeSec," the ro-tund shopkeeper said. "I was beginning to think you'd moved. But that's impossible, isn't it? You'd have notified me if you'd gotten a promotion."

"Yes, Greevy, that's true. I've just not been around lately. Very busy these days." Quellen frowned. He didn't want the news of his absence noised all around the community. He made his order, statted the supplies upstairs, and left the supply shop.

He stepped out into the street for a moment and stood watching as the multitudes streamed past. Their clothes were of all designs and colors. They talked incessantly. The world was a beehive, vastly overpopulated and getting more so daily. Quellen longed for the quiet retreat he had built at such great cost and with so much trepidation. The more he saw of crocodiles, the less he cared for the company of the mobs who swarmed the crowded cities.

All sorts of illegal things went on—not, as in Quellen's case, justifiable efforts to escape an intolerable existence, but shady, vicious, unpardonable things. Like this Lanoy, Quellen thought, fingering the n.inislip in his pocket. How did he manage to hide his activities, whatever they were, from his roommates? Surely he wasn't Class Thirteen.

Quellen felt a strange kinship with the unseen Lanoy. He, too, was beating the game. He was a wily one, possibly worth knowing. Then Quellen moved on.

CHAPTER III

BROGG phoned him and got him back to the office in a hurry. Quellen found his two Under-Secs waiting with a third man, a tall, angular, shabbily-dressed fellow with a broken nose that

projected beaklike from his face. Brogg had turned the oxy vent up to full.

"Is this the fellow?" Quellen said. It didn't seem likely that this seedy prolet—too poor, apparently, to afford a plastic job on his nose—was the force behind the hoppers.

"Depends on what fellow you mean," Brogg said. "Tell the CrimeSec who you are," he said, nudging the prolet roughly with his elbow.

"Name is Brand," the prolet said in a thin, oddly high voice. "Class Four. I didn't mean no harm, sir—it was just that he promised me a home all my own, and a job, and fresh air—"

Brogg cut him off. "We ran up against this fellow in a drinker. He had had one or two too many and was telling everyone that he'd have a job soon."

"That's what the fellow said," Brand mumbled. "Just had to give him two hundred credits and he'd send me somewhere where everyone had a job. And I'd be able to send money back to bring my family along. It sounded so good, sir."

"What was this fellow's name?" Quellen asked sharply.

"Lanoy, sir." Quellen felt a startled pang of recognition at hearing the name. "Someone gave me this and told me to get in touch with him."

Brand held out a crumpled

minislip. Quellen unfolded it and read it. "*Out of work? See Lanoy. Very interesting.*" He reached into his own pocket and pulled out the slip he had been handed on the flyramp. *Out of work? See Lanoy.* They were identical.

"Lanoy's sent a lot of my friends there," Brand said. "He told me they were all working and happy there, sir—"

"Where does he send them?" Quellen asked gently.

"I don't know, sir. Lanoy said he was going to tell me when I gave him the two hundred credits. I drew out all my savings. I was on my way to him, and I just dropped in for a short one—when—when—"

"When we found him," Brogg finished. "Telling everyone in sight that he was heading to Lanoy to get a job."

"Hmm. Do you know what the hoppers are, Brand?"

"No, sir."

"Never mind, then. Suppose you take us to Lanoy."

"I can't do that. It wouldn't be fair. All my friends—"

"Suppose we *make* you take us to Lanoy," Quellen said.

"But he was going to give me a job! I can't do it. Please, sir."

Brogg looked at Quellen. "Let me try," he said. "Lanoy was going to give you a job, you say? For two hundred credits?"

"Yes, sir."

"Suppose we tell you that we'll give you a job for nothing. No charge at all, just lead us to Lanoy and we'll send you where he was going to send you, only free. And we'll send your family along too."

Quellen smiled. Brogg was a much better psychologist than he was; he was forced to admit it.

"That's fair," Brand said. "I'll take you. I feel bad about it—Lanoy was nice to me—but if you say you'll send me for nix..."

"Quite right, Brand," Brogg said.

"I'll do it, then."

Quellen turned down the oxy vent. "Let's go before he changes his mind," Brogg gestured to Mikken, who led Brand out.

"Are you coming with us, sir?" Brogg asked. There was just a hint of sarcasm behind Brogg's obsequious tones. "It'll probably be a pretty filthy part of town."

Quellen shivered. "You're right," he said. "You two take him. I'll wait here."

As soon as they were gone, Quellen rang Koll.

"We're hot on the trail," he said. "Brogg and Mikken have found the man who's doing it, and they'll bring him back."

"Fine work," Koll said coldly. "It should be an interesting investigation. But please don't dis-



turb us for a while. Spanner and I are discussing departmental status changes." He hung up.

Now what did that mean? Quellen wondered. By now he was sure Koll knew about Africa. Brogg had probably been offered a bigger bribe to talk than Quellen had given him to be silent, and he had sold out to the highest bidder. Of course, Koll might have meant a promotion, but demotion was a more likely change in status to discuss.

Quellen's offense was a unique one. No one else, to his knowledge, had been shrewd enough to find a way out of heavily-overpopulated Appalachia, the octopus of a city that spread all over the eastern half of North America. Of all the two hundred million inhabitants of Appalachia, only Joseph Quellen CrimeSec had been clever enough to find a bit of unknown and unsettled land in the heart of Africa and build himself a second home there. He had the standard Class Thirteen cubicle in Appalachia, plus a Class Twenty mansion beyond the dreams of most mortals, beside a murky stream in the Congo. It was nice, very nice, for a man whose soul rebelled at the insect-like existence in Appalachia.

The only trouble was that it took money to keep people bribed. There were a few who had

to know that Quellen was living luxuriously in Africa instead of dwelling in a ten-by-ten cubicle in Northwest Appalachia, like a good Thirteen. Someone—Brogg, he was sure—had sold out to Koll. And Quellen was on thin ice indeed.

A demotion would rob him even of the privilege of maintaining a private cubicle, and he would go back to sharing his home, as he had with the unlamented Marok. It hadn't been so bad when he had been below Class Twelve and had lived, first in the dorms, then in gradually more private rooms. He hadn't minded other people so much when he was younger. But then to move to Class Twelve and be put into a room with just one other person, that had been the most painful of all, souring Quellen permanently.

Marok had been a genuinely fine fellow, Quellen reflected. But he had jarred on Quellen's nerves, with his sloppiness and his unending visiphone calls and his constant presence. Quellen had longed for the day when he would reach Thirteen and live alone, no longer with a roommate as a constant check. He would be free—free to hide from the crowd.

Did Koll know? He'd soon find out whether he did.

The phone clicked. It was Brogg.

"We have him," Brogg said. "We're on our way back."

"Fine work, fine work."

Quellen dialed Koll. "We've caught the man," he said. "Brogg and Mikken are bringing him back here for interrogation."

"Good job," Koll said, and Quellen noted the trace of an honest smile flickering on the small man's lips. "I've just filled out a promotion form for you, by the way," he added casually. "It seems unfair to let the CrimeSec live in a Class Thirteen unit when he rates at least a Fourteen."

So he doesn't know after all, Quellen thought. Then another thought came: how could he move the illegal stat to new quarters without being detected? Perhaps Koll was only leading him deeper into a trap. Quellen pressed his palms against his temples and shivered, waiting, for Brogg, Mikken—and Lanoy.

"YOU ADMIT you've been sending people into the past?" Quellen demanded.

"Sure," said the little man flippantly. Quellen watched him and felt an irrational pulse of anger go through him. "Sure. I'll send you back for two hundred creds."

Brogg stood with folded arms behind the little man, and Quellen faced him over the table.

"You're Lanoy?"

"That's my name." He was a small, dark, intense, rabbit-like sort of man, with thin lips constantly moving. "Sure, I'm Lanoy." The little man radiated a confident warmth. He sat with his legs crossed and his head thrown back.

"It was pretty nasty the way your boys tracked me down," Lanoy said. "It was bad enough that you fooled that poor prolet into leading you to me, but they didn't need to rough me up. I'm not doing anything illegal, you know. I ought to sue."

"You're disturbing the past thousand years!"

"I am not," Lanoy said calmly. "They've already been disturbed. I'm just seeing to it that past history takes place the way it took place, if you know what I mean."

Quellen stood up, but found he had no room to move in the tiny office, and sat down again ineffectually. He felt strangely weak in the presence of the slyster.

"But you're sending proles back to become the hoppers. Why?"

Lanoy smiled. "To earn a living. Surely you understand that. I'm in possession of a very valuable process, and I want to make sure I get all I can out of it."

"Did you invent time-travel?"

"It doesn't matter," said Lanoy. "I control it."

"Why don't you simply go back in time and steal or place bets to make a living?"

"I could," Lanoy admitted. "But the process is irreversible, and there's no way of getting back to the present again. And I like it here, thank you."

Quellen scratched his head. He *liked* it here? It seemed incredible that anyone would, but apparently Lanoy meant just what he said.

"Look, Lanoy," Quellen said. "I'll be frank: we want your time-travel gimmick, and we want it fast."

"Sorry," said Lanoy. "Private property. You don't have any right to it."

Quellen thought of Koll and Spanner, and got angry and frightened at the same time. "When I get through with you you'll wish you'd used your own machine and gone back a million years."

Lanoy remained calm, and Quellen was surprised to see Brogg smiling. "Come now, CrimeSec," the slyster said. "You're starting to get angry, and that's always illogical."

Quellen saw the truth of what Lanoy was saying, but he lost the struggle to calm himself. "I'll keep you under arrest until you rot," he threatened.

"Now where will that get you?" Lanoy asked. "Would you mind giving me a little more oxy

in here, please, by the way? I'm suffocating."

In his astonishment Quellen opened the vent wide. Brogg registered surprise, and even Mikken blinked at Lanoy's breach of taste.

"If you arrest me I'll break you, Quellen. There's nothing illegal in what I'm doing. Look here—I'm a registered slyster." Lanoy produced a card, properly stamped.

Quellen didn't know what to say. Lanoy definitely had him on the run, he knew, and Brogg was enjoying his discomfiture immensely. Quellen chewed his lip, watching the little man closely, and wishing fervently that he were back beside his Congo stream throwing rocks at the crocodiles.

"I'm going to put a stop to your time-travelling, anyway," Quellen finally said.

Lanoy chuckled. "I wouldn't advise it, Quellen."

"CrimeSec to you, Lanoy."

"I wouldn't advise it, *Quellen*," Lanoy repeated. "If you cut off the hoppers now, you'll turn the past topsy-turvy. Those people went back. It's recorded in history. Some of them married and had children, and the descendants of those children are alive today. For all you know, Quellen, you may be the descendant of a hopper I'm going to send back next week—and if

that hopper never gets back, Quellen, you'll pop out of existence like a snuffed candle. Sound like a pleasant way to die, CrimeSec?"

Quellen stared glumly. Brogg stood silently behind Lanoy, and it became apparent to the CrimeSec now that the burly UnderSec had been gunning for Quellen's job all along, and that Lanoy was doing an effective job of eliminating the last stumbling-block in his way. Marok, Koll, Spanner, Brogg, and now Lanoy—they were all determined to see Quellen enmeshed. It was an unvoiced conspiracy. Silently he cursed the two hundred million jostling inhabitants of Appalachia, and wondered if he'd ever know a moment's solitude again.

"The past won't be changed, Lanoy," he said. "We'll lock you up, all right, and take away your machine, but we'll see to it ourselves that the hoppers go back. We're no fools, Lanoy. We'll see to it that everything stays as it is."

Lanoy watched him almost with pity for a moment, as one might observe a particularly rare butterfly impaled on a mounting-board.

"Is that your game, CrimeSec? Why didn't you tell me that before? In that case I'll have to take steps to protect myself."

Quellen felt like hiding. "What are you going to do?"

"Suppose we talk it over privately, Quellen," the slyster said. "I might say some things you wouldn't want your subordinates to hear."

Quellen glanced at Brogg. "Have you searched him?"

"He's clean," Brogg said. "Nothing to fear. We'll wait in the anteroom. Come on, Mikken."

Ponderously, Brogg stalked out of the room, followed by the silent Mikken.

WITH the occupants of the room numbering just two, Quellen moved to cut down the oxy vent.

"Leave it up, Quellen," Lanoy said. "I like to breathe well at government expense."

"What's your game?" Quellen asked. He was angry; Lanoy was a completely vicious creature who offended Quellen's pride and dignity.

"I'll be blunt with you, CrimeSec," the slyster said. "I want my freedom, and I want to continue in business. I like it that way. That's what I want. You want to arrest me and take over my business. That's what you want. Right?"

"Yes."

"Now in a situation like that we have an interplay of mutually exclusive desires. So the stronger of the two forces wins—all the time. I'm stronger, and so you'll

have to let me go and forget all about the investigation."

"Who says you're stronger, Lanoy?"

"I'm strong because you're weak. I know a lot of things about you, Quellen. I know how you hate crowds and like fresh air and open spaces. These are pretty awkward idiosyncrasies to live with in a world like ours, aren't they?"

"Go on," said Quellen. He cursed Brogg silently—no one else could have revealed his secret to Lanoy.

"So you're going to let me walk out of here, or else you'll find yourself back in a Class Twelve or Ten unit. You won't like it much there, CrimeSec. You'll have to share a room, and you may not like your roommate, but there'll be nothing you can do. And when you have a room-mate, you won't be free to run away. He'll report you."

"What do you mean, run away?" Quellen's voice was little more than a husky whisper.

"I mean run away to Africa, Quellen."

That was it, Quellen thought. Now it's over; Brogg's sold me down the river. With Lanoy in possession of Quellen's secret, Quellen was completely in the little slyster's power.

"I hate to do this to you, Quellen. You're a pretty good sort, caught in a world you didn't

make and don't especially like. But it's either you or me, and you know who always wins in deals like that."

Check and mate.

"Go ahead," Quellen whispered. "Get moving."

"I knew you'd see it my way," Lanoy said. "I'll leave now. You don't interfere with me, and Koll won't ever know about your little shack."

"Get out," Quellen said.

Lanoy got up, saluted Quellen, and slipped out through the door.

CHAPTER IV

AS LANOY left, Koll entered. Quellen, his face in his hands, saw Koll out of the corner of one eye and thought for a moment that it was Lanoy returning. Then he looked up.

"I thought I'd have a look at your slyster," Koll said. "But I see he's not around."

"I sent him inside," Quellen said weakly.

"I'll check," said Koll. "I'm quite curious about him." He left, and Brogg entered.

"Have a nice chat, CrimeSec?" Brogg asked, smiling. As always, the fat man's forehead was strung with a row of perspiration-beads.

"Very nice, thank you." Quellen looked imploringly at his assistant. If only he could be left

alone for a few moments!

"He doesn't seem to be here any more, CrimeSec. I had a few questions for your friend Lanoy, but I can't find him."

"I don't know where he went to, Brogg."

"Are you sure, now, CrimeSec? Where is he, Quellen?" he said maliciously.

"I don't know." It was the first time Brogg had dropped the honorific in addressing Quellen. "Go away."

Brogg smiled slyly and left, closing the door with care. Quellen sat in his pneumochair, shaking his head from side to side. He was in for it now. If he failed to produce Lanoy, they'd have his neck. If he recaptured the little slyster, Lanoy would give the show away. Either way they had him.

He tiptoed through the front office, where Brogg glared at him with evident interest, stepped out into the crowded street, and caught the first quickboat back to his apartment. It was good to be alone again. He wandered around aimlessly for a moment, and then walked over to face the stat.

All he had to do was step through it and he'd be back in Africa, by the side of the twisting stream and the crocodiles. No more job, but they'd never find him, and he could spend the rest of his days peacefully.

No good, he thought dismally. It wasn't safe, with Brogg and Lanoy knowing. Between the two of them, they'd ferret him out quickly enough. Africa held no security.

Besides, he felt a strange new feeling growing in him—a feeling that he was put upon, that he was a sort of martyr to overcrowding. He thrust his hands in his pocket and stood before the stat, revolving in his mind the implications of this new concept. A world he never made, Lanoy had said.

All guilt dissolved. Let Koll unravel the mess to suit himself, Quellen thought.

IT WAS done.

There was a swirling and a twisting, and Quellen felt as if he had been turned inside-out and disembowelled. He was floating on a purple cloud high above some indistinct terrain, and he was falling.

He dropped, heels over head, and landed in a scrambled heap on a long green carpet. He lay there for a moment or two, just holding on to the ground.

A handful of the carpet tore off in his fist. He looked at it with a puzzled expression on his face.

Grass.

The clean smell of the air hit him next, almost as a physical shock. It smelled like a room with

full oxy, but this was outdoors.

Quellen gathered himself together and stood up. The grassy carpet extended in all directions, and in front of him there was a great thicket of trees.

He had seen trees in Africa. There were none in Appalachia. He looked. A small gray bird came out on the overhanging branch of the nearest tree and began to chirp, unafraid, at Quellen. He smiled.

He wondered how long Koll and Brogg would search for him, and whether Brogg would cope with Lanoy. He hoped not; Brogg was a scoundrel, and Lanoy, despite his slyster habits, was a gentleman.

Quellen began to move toward the forest. He would have to locate a stream and build a house next to it, he decided. He could make the house as big as he wanted.

He felt no guilt. He had been a misfit, thrown into a world he could only hate and which could only ensnarl him. Now he had his chance; it was all up to him.

Two deer came bounding out of the forest. Quellen stood aghast. He had never seen animals that size. Happily, they skipped off into the distance.

Quellen's heart began to sing as he filled his lungs with the sweet air. Marok, Koll, Spanner, Brogg. They began to fade and blur. Good old Lanoy, he

thought. He'd kept his word after all.

The world is mine, Quellen thought. So now I'm a hopper, too—taking the longest hop of all.

A tall, red-skinned man emerged from the forest and stood near a tree, regarding Quellen gravely. He was dressed in a leather belt, a pair of san-

dals, and nothing else, and in his hair was a decorative feather. The red-skinned man studied Quellen for a moment and then raised his arm in a gesture Quellen could not fail to interpret. A warm feeling of comradeship glowed in Quellen.

Smiling at last, Quellen went forward to meet him, palm up-raised.

∞ ∞ ∞

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I KNEW it might be dangerous to stop and pick him up, but I did it anyway. A number of things combined to give an extra push to the sudden impulse I felt when the headlights tunneled down the dark and picked him out, thumb jerking, along the side of the highway. First, I had been traveling across the desert for six hours, alone. The car radio which I did not understand was not working, and I did not even have that hideous squawking which they call music to keep me company. And if I had been tearing along the unwinding concrete ribbon at eighty, I would have blurred by him without stopping—but as it was, the road had just made one of those impossible S-curves which for some inexplicable reason the builders have laid out through deserted cornfields or unpopulated deserts. I was down to fifty, and I saw him and recalled the things the newspapers wrote about similar occurrences, but I braked the car anyway, my head suddenly dizzy with the impulse, like a dizziness of wine.

You *deserve* to talk with someone, one side of my mind argued. It is not good to live so much inside yourself. The brakes took hold, the car rocked slower and the hitch-hiker's thumb came down. He blinked into the headlights.

Fool! the other side of my

my brother on the highway

by JOHN JAKES

The hitch-hiker was

trying to escape, all

right. But from what?

mind answered. You are not *supposed* to be living pleasantly or normally. You have a job to perform, and for half a dozen more hours you are not your own master.

But the car was down to five miles an hour. *Speed up!* that angry side of my mind commanded me, but it was too late. He was already walking past the hood, shielding his eyes from the headlight glare. Now his hand was opening the door. Now his head bobbed as he prepared to climb inside. *Too late.* I suddenly felt trapped. But he slid onto the seat with a deep breath, jerked the door shut and leaned back. I started the car forward again as he took a cigarette from his jacket pocket, put it between his lips and extended the pack to me.

"Smoke?"

"No. No, thanks. I can't take the stuff." *Fool!* sang the angry half. *Be careful!*

He took out a lighter, then tossed it up and caught it. "Guess I won't either." He took the cigarette from his mouth and threw it out the window. I glanced at him from the corner of my eye. He was tall and thin, with a bent nose and faintly slanted eyes that seemed to laugh within themselves. He wore no hat, only a leather jacket and dark trousers and shirt.

"Thanks for the ride," he said at last. "I was afraid . . . I thought nobody would come along."

"S'all right," I muttered.

"My name's Bailey," he said.

"Rogers," I told him. Off in the desert to the left, row on row of blue lights winked. "Is that a town?" I said.

His eyes slitted down to nothing. "That's the Desert Flats Project. Where they make H-bombs. Haven't you ever been in this part of the country before?"

"No," I said. To the left of the highway tall electrically wired fences sprang up, with signs warning people out of restricted areas.

"Where you heading?" Bailey asked.

"To—to Los Angeles," I lied, quickly thinking of a city.

I felt nervous because I could see the narrow eyes watching me, studying me, pinpointed with light from the pale white glow of the dash panel. I suddenly felt afraid.

BUT Bailey said nothing. His eyes seemed to close. I pushed the car up to seventy-five, suddenly thinking that I should have asked him how far he was going, because I was not going to Los Angeles and I could not have him with me for much longer. But a side-glance showed

him to be asleep and somehow I did not want to wake him up and talk to him at all.

White objects sprang up far down the highway and I braked the car slightly. "What's this?" I thought and I must have muttered it aloud, for Bailey sat up, his eyes snapped open and he hunched forward, peering through the bug-splotted glass.

"Road block," he hissed.

"Road . . ." I felt dryness in my throat, because out of his jacket had come a large blue gun, the muzzle seemingly black and deep as a pit, and it was pointed at my head. Bailey did not scowl, but he was quietly, savagely firm.

"Go right through. Don't stop."

"But I've got to stop. I—"

"Keep driving or I'll kill you," he said evenly. The angry side of my mind went mad with shrill shrieking pleasure, with jeering revenge. The white shapes were boards across the highway, and there were men in military uniform, blank-faced in the glare of the headlights. They waved. Their white gloves stood out against the night. I saw one of those jeeps, stenciled white on the side. *Property Desert Flats Project*. Holding my teeth together I pressed the accelerator to the floor. I heard shouts above the roar of air, and then a white face threw up a

rifle and the right-hand window crashed and Bailey let out a soft scream and twitched his right shoulder. I ducked my head at that instant and the white boards splintered as we smashed through, and then darkness again, and only the highway unwinding. I was not worried about the car being damaged, not by ordinary wooden boards. I watched the rear-view mirror. Jeep lights flecked the darkness behind us. In five minutes we had outdistanced them.

But there would be more of the road blocks ahead, certainly. And I could not afford to be late for the rendezvous . . .

"Keep . . ." Bailey gasped. He was turned toward me in the seat, and I could see that the right side of his jacket was wet, but he covered the wound with his left hand. His right hand held the gun. He weaved back and forth, dizzy, on the seat. "Keep driving. Don't . . . stop."

"You escaped from the Desert Flats Project," I said softly.

"Shut up, shut *up*. Just drive."

I had read newspaper stories of men who had stolen secrets from the Desert Flats Project. They had all been caught, imprisoned or shot afterwards. Now I had one of them riding with me.

Slowly I got control of my thoughts. Bailey's eyes were dim, genuinely closing now

every other second. The gun muzzle wobbled. His head would fall forward, then snap up as he woke with a start. I strained my eyes ahead on the highway. No more roadblocks. I wished that I could sweat. On either side of the highway the desert looked hard and level. That would suit my purpose, if . . . if . . .

For fifteen minutes, agonized minutes, I drove. The last five, Bailey did not raise his head. I slowed the car, swung the wheel and rolled off the highway onto the hard-packed sand and stopped the car. I leaned over and plucked the gun from Bailey's loose hand and threw it far out the window. Then I breathed heavily and flicked out all the car lights except for the dash.

I got out, walked around the car and opened the door. Bailey fell against me. I started to drag him out onto the ground where I would leave him when his hand fell away from the wound on his jacket. I gasped. I opened his jacket, his shirt below that to make sure. From the wound came ichor.

Blue ichor.

THE stunning shock of it struck me for a moment, and then I laughed. Why not, then, q'Tiq, I said to myself? Hundreds, thousands of us here. Of course what more natural than

one on the Desert Flats Project, learning of that as I had learned of economics in the brokerage house? Perhaps he had missed his rendezvous, been trapped behind the wire fences and been unable to escape until this night.

Make sure!

With the artificial thumbnail of my right hand I chipped at his skin and it flaked away, dried and hard since the day it was first sprayed over his body. Beneath the caking, through the tiny hole, I saw flat grayness. I pushed him back against the seat, closed the door and hurried to get back under the wheel. There I used part of my shirt to plug his wound and bind it. I slapped his face, hard, until he stirred.

He saw me, looked down at himself, the open shirt, the chipped-away plastic, and uttered a strangled cry, his hands aimed at my throat. I held him off with all the strength I had in one hand.

"Stop! Stop!" I shouted in dialect. Nails of my other hand were chipping the substance from my palm. I jerked that hand under the dashlights. "See! See!"

He relaxed weakly, then laughed, shook his head. "You . . ."

"q'Tiq," I whispered. "Sector Three, Pre-conquest Investigation Group."

"q'Dal," he replied. "Sector Ten, Pre-conquest Investigation Group."

"I rendezvous tonight."

"Mine was three days ago. I..."

He groaned and leaned back against the seat. "I've made up my mind," I said. "You need attention. I'll rendezvous before the appointed time." I touched his shoulder in comradeship. "Rest, q'Dal. We will soon be away from this pest-hole."

Out of the car and quickly to work, I stripped the false metal plating from my little craft. Then inside again, and a touch of the controls made the hidden lightless jets roar from under the rear of the machine. With a shudder we were free of the desert, while I opened the hidden compartment in the dash and checked coordinates. q'Dal was asleep now, and I could already see the bone-structure of our race beneath his false mask, see it because now I knew he was one of us.

With a laugh, a feeling of exultation, I looked below. On the highway pairs of puny lights flickered and moved to and fro. The sky opened and the earth curved below. They would find a gun and automobile body metal and nothing else, in the middle of the desert. The jets whined. The air thinned and the cockpit sealed itself air-tight with a whirr of perfectly machined precision.

I had a long rest in store now. I saw the stars, bright, clear, and the earth was far below. Our home gleamed red in the heavens. Then I caught sight of the black hulk of the rendezvous ship blotting out the stars and I used the steering mechanism to send signals, explaining what had happened. They signaled us aboard. The jets sang. A lock yawned in the belly of the ship that would carry us home to Mars. The lock waited to receive us, and on the seat beside me, q'Dal, my brother from the highway, slept. . . .

∞ ∞ ∞

FLETCHER PRATT, historian, naval expert, and science-fiction writer, died of cancer on Monday, June 11, 1956.

In the words of his close friend and collaborator, L. Sprague de Camp, "His death is a loss to American letters, to science fiction, and most of all to the friends who valued him as a rich, rare and complex personality. He was one of those men around whom others revolve like planets."

THE



INDIGESTIBLE INVADERS

*The aliens weren't really aliens,
they hated violence, and their
motives were highly moral.*

*Which made the invasion unique
—uniquely deadly, that is!*

Illustrated by EM SH

I WAS taking my afternoon airing in the fields of MaGregor sector B-11, near Belvil Intersection. Although the district is vulnerable from the south and west, I was unguarded. In my eighth decade, I was of a tough and leathery consistency; not even the hungriest Red would be interested in me.

The date was Sol 3, 2805; the time was approximately 14 hours. The fields I speak of, surrounding the exit tunnel, were planted to hybrid tomatoes. I say were; I never saw the ruin of a crop occur so abruptly and thoroughly.

The day was still. Off toward the river, some 20 miles away, there was a faint yellowish haze. I sensed a familiar, rather irritating tension in the air; I knew we were in a high, which the forecasters were attempting to warp northeastwards in order to bring a low up the valley. They were experiencing some difficulty, and among field operators, who worked up in the weather, bets were being laid as to the outcome.

I was musing on this subject when my eye was caught by a perceptibly moving object low in the west. Watching it idly, I

speculated that the forecasters were bringing in an atmosphere bomb to move the high along. Then I noted that the object was moving erratically, and too low to be a weather bureau plane. Also, even through the yellowish haze which in part concealed it, I could see that the object shone with a piercing brightness, too acute and too ruddy to be reflected sunlight. I concluded that it was a missile.

While my mind moved along these lines, my body remained inert. I was able to feel the tension in my right forearm as I reached for my headknife—an instinctive reaction—but otherwise it appeared as if my bodily processes had slowed down almost to a halt.

Mentally agile, however, I had formed the conclusion that the missile was moving at supersonic speed, and appeared to be directed on a path which intersected my position. The thought that such a missile would be illegal and immoral, obvious though it is, did not cross my mind at that time. I was concerned with the probable area in which the missile would strike, as it was now growing larger with alarming swiftness.

Still physically helpless, my arm having progressed only a fraction of an inch toward the knife at my side, I was forced to stand and watch the object—

an incandescent, yellow-white globe, as it now appeared—loom to the bigness of a gang harvester, then to that of a sun mirror, a beam power station, a small mountain.

I could feel the heat on my face as I stared helplessly at the oncoming brightness. My eyes itched and watered painfully. Something not altogether removed from the nature of terror distended my throat, and my jaw began to open rigidly, as if to shout.

There came an instantaneous shriek and explosion which hurt my eardrums and left me deafened. Together with this, there was a flare of yellow light which almost blinded me. But these sensations lasted only the fraction of a moment, for I was lifted from my feet and hurled some yards backward by the shock wave.

WHEN I recovered from a temporary unconsciousness and regained my erect posture, ascertaining that I was not suffering from any severe wound, I discovered that the whole field before me was blackened and torn, to an almost unrecognizable degree. Hardly a shred of vegetation gave a clue that this had formerly been a field of tomatoes.

Near the center, half concealed by the lip of a large crater, lay

what I supposed to be the fallen missile. It was still glowing red, and giving off a strong scent of heated metal. However, it was much smaller than it had seemed before the impact, hardly longer than an interurban rail car and of approximately the same proportions. It had a wrecked appearance: I saw gaping seams and crumpled walls. Smoke was rising from several places, and a curtain of heated air shimmered over the scene.

Retreating to the exit tunnel, I put in an immediate emergency call to Sector Militia. Sector Leader Prescott MaGregor and five men responded, arriving on the scene a few minutes later. I pointed out the object to this officer, and we discussed the necessary measures. While waiting, I had taken pictures of the object to be used later, if necessary, in establishing the illegal and immoral nature of this Red missile, if such it proved to be. Sector Leader Prescott MaGregor volunteered to carry these pictures back to safety in case the missile should belatedly explode, but I persuaded him to delegate the task.

Circling the half-buried object at the closest approach its heat would permit, I now discovered what appeared to be portholes at intervals in the exposed side, suggestive of a manned vehicle rather than a missile. However,

I saw no evidence of wings, nor had they been perceptible while the object was in flight. The fanciful idea occurred to me that this object was one of the ill-fated "spaceships" fired off seven centuries before, at the close of the previous era—that, having assumed a cometary orbit, it had finally returned to crash on the world of its origin. I then had the thought, even more fanciful, that I was witnessing the invasion from outer space—the "third clan" so beloved of satirical poets in our younger generation—of which I had read in many a digest of a highly-colored romance.

This turned out to be only too true.

While I stood on the down-slope side, watching the object, a segment of the crumpled hull suddenly lost its glow, dimmed, glistened with water droplets, and then turned white with frost. Such, at any rate, was the appearance. This lasted only a moment, but after a short pause was repeated. I called to MaGregor and his remaining men to witness this, and they arrived in time to see the second repetition. These strange phenomena continued, the frost taking longer to melt on each subsequent occasion, until the whole affected surface no longer glowed with heat and looked almost cool enough to touch.

While we were debating this, the area in question abruptly shone white around an irregular perimeter, sprang upward a matter of several inches with a groan of metal, and was then hurled away to fall clattering on the ground.

Before we could recover our self-possession, several indistinct figures poured out of the opening and raced across the field toward the adjoining nut orchard.

We gave immediate chase, and after some strenuous work among the trees, were able to capture three of the invaders, as I must call them: runtish, gray-skinned men with eyes slitted horizontally, like those of goats, and six-fingered hands. They were abnormally strong, and hissed at us in an unknown, spitting language.

SINCE the occasion was without precedent, I did not order these captives killed immediately, but had them imprisoned, and called a special synod. As district patriarch I could of course have made an administrative ruling, but where tradition does not guide us I believe it is best to go cautiously. Meanwhile, eight more of the invaders were captured within a few miles of the landing site, and three killed while resisting capture. A thorough search of the district failed

to disclose any more, and it was felt that we could be confident that we had them all.

At and preceding the synod itself, the prisoners were interrogated by means of signs and picture-drawing, which method although crude was sufficient to establish that the gray men came from the planet Venus, and were here, as they said, on a journey of exploration. Examinations were also made by my personal staff of physicians, including one dissection, and their verdict, as rendered by Dr. Molhaus, was as follows:

"The prisoners are monotremes, with an advanced nervous system comparable to that of man, but apparently unrelated to any earthly organism."

The logical inference from this was clear: the prisoners did not and could not belong to our clan, the Whites. They had been fairly caught on White territory; I therefore ordered them sent to the district mortisserie. Protein is protein.

Privately, I was congratulating myself that the whole matter had been dealt with so expeditiously and with so little lasting effect. The wreckage of the alien ship was being cut up and hauled away for reclamation; the damaged field would be reconditioned and replanted in corn. In a few months, except for that unexpected rectangle of tall stalks

among the tomato plants, there would be no remaining evidence of the invaders' landing. A very satisfactory end to an unpleasant business.

In ancient times, that is, six or seven centuries ago, our records intimate that there were many small clans, some with quaint pre-dynastic names, such as Canucks, Rotarians, Baptists and so on; but as the competition for food and living space grew more severe, these gradually merged into the two great father-clans of modern times, Whites and Reds—we Whites holding all the Western hemisphere except for portions of South America, and the Reds similarly holding all the Eastern hemisphere, with the exception of our colonies in Asia and Africa. The system was so stable that it had endured without change for 16 generations: our excesses of population were adjusted equally by our losses in raiding parties on Red territory, as well as by their depredations among us.

At the same time, this process improved the race, by selecting the most agile and alert to survive the "toothsome twenties." Best of all, five centuries of non-intercourse had almost obliterated the close genetic ties which had formerly united the Reds and ourselves.

On both sides, respect for family is so strong that it would

make us extremely uncomfortable to think that we might risk eating a relative, however well disguised by the mortisserie. And yet Man, as we know, is one of our most important sources of body-building proteins, fats and minerals.

A system that gives such satisfaction all around must be preserved by every means. And, in truth, the only thing that could conceivably upset it—as far as we knew—would be the splitting off, or creation in some other fashion, of a third clan. For, as our philosophers have pointed out, in a world of three clans the possibility would always exist that two would combine against the third, upsetting the balance of power. To guard against this possibility, each clan would be under the necessity of building better and better defenses, and equipping its warriors with more and more illegal and immoral weapons, with the eventual result a cataclysmic series of wars, such as destroyed the preceding civilization. Two, in our religion, is the mystic number of forces in balance, symbolized by The Wrestlers; while three is the number of discord and chaos.

It was natural, then, that I should feel relieved at the quick passing of an emergency so long speculated upon, and with so much anxiety. Returning to my apartments in Level Three, under

the Capitol, I found the table invitingly laid with meat loaves, green celery, synthetic cranberry jelly, sugar wafers and pineapple juice. I dined with pleasure, and, after exchanging one or two short routine calls with the chiefs of departments, I retired for the night.

Although well past 70, I am in the prime of health, and am seldom troubled with digestive disorders, prostate or bladder difficulties or any infirmity of that kind, such as plague many of my friends. Judge my surprise, then, to discover shortly after retiring that I was afflicted with severe stomach cramps, to which, shortly, nausea was added. I relieved myself as well as I could, but, when the cramps continued summoned Dr. Molhaus. There ensued the following colloquy:

Molhaus: What have you been eating?

I: Ask your staff. Don't you check what goes onto my table any more?

Molhaus: Well, you have all the symptoms of severe indigestion.

I: I know that. What did I get it from—and who else has the same?

Molhaus: It might have been the invader meat. It passed every one of the Six Poison Tests, and the chefs told me it was unusually delicious, so I had some sent

down to your table. I ate some myself, as a matter of fact.

(At this point, Dr. Molhaus doubled over in pain.)

I: If both our souls get to Resurrection together, Molhaus, mine is going to kick yours all the way to the Gates.

These were my last words on that occasion, as in a few moments I lost consciousness and passed into a coma. The same fate, I later learned, overtook Dr. Molhaus, as well as more than thirty other persons who had been served portions of invader meat in their evening meals.

UPON recovering 32 hours later, I was assured by Dr. Robert, Molhaus' ranking assistant, that everything was being done to ascertain the cause and extent of the disorder resulting from the eating of invader meat. Samples of the uncooked meat, he told me, were being elaborately dissected and analyzed in the district biochemical laboratories. I was forced to be content with this. I had awakened greatly weakened and reduced, however, in spite of having been vein-fed with glucose during my coma. To make up for this, I immediately consumed a large breakfast of oatmeal and gluten cakes. The taste, though a little strange, was not displeasing; but I had an uneasy recollection that numer-

ous foodstuffs found in the alien ship had been added to the district stores. Could they have found their way so soon into the sub-district kitchen bins?

I called Dr. Robert and ordered him to look into the matter. His honest, knife-scarred face peered earnestly back at me from the visor. "Chief," he said, "that will be done, but I'm afraid it's too late."

"What do you mean?" I demanded, clutching the bedcovers.

He replied, "Seventeen of the people who ate invader meat have since had meals of ordinary food. I am collating the reports now. In sixteen cases, approximately twenty minutes after ingestion, the following symptoms occurred: stomach cramps, nausea, and vomiting."

"And the seventeenth case?" I asked.

"You are it," he told me, looking at his fingerwatch with unmannerly ostentation.

I attempted to reprimand him, but was overcome in the middle of a word by the symptoms described—which were, indeed, an exact repetition of my former experience.

When I recovered, I glared at Robert, who by this time had reached my bedside. "Let me understand this," I said. "Is the same thing going to happen to me whenever I eat something that *is* invader meat, and when-

ever I eat something that is *not* invader meat? If so, *what do I eat to keep from starving to death?*"

"Glucose," he said, "appears to be digestible, but you can't live on that very long. However, the case is somewhat different than it appears." Robert looked nervous, and shuffled some papers in his hands.

"Well?" I prompted him.

"I was struck by the similarity of the two attacks," he resumed, "one apparently caused by the eating of invader food, one by the eating of normal food. However, there is one difference." He glanced at his watch. "So far, in the second wave of attacks, there have been *no comas*."

I confessed that I had overlooked this. I could not see the significance of it, however, and told Robert so.

"I took the liberty," he said, "of performing an operation on one of the class-seven workers who was among the first group of victims. I cut out a portion of his stomach lining and sent it up to the district biochemical laboratories, to be analyzed along with the invader meat."

"Well?" I said.

"Their first report is in," he said. "It indicates that the alien specimen is composed of peptide chains, superficially resembling the proteins of ordinary food, but chemically quite different.

Naturally, it would not be digestible by us. Furthermore, the alien specimens have been found to contaminate other samples. There is a strong presumption that the peptide chains form stronger linkages than normal proteins. In their presence, proteins tend to break down and re-form as peptides. That is, in effect, the peptides are self-propagating, using the similar chains of normal protein as raw material."

I frowned at him. "In two words, what are you getting at?"

"The *coma*," he said. "That was when the process was working itself out in the victims' bodies. Apparently, the process is just gradual enough so that life can be maintained during the changeover. When the victims recovered, they were outwardly the same, but actually converted to a totally different system of colloid chemistry. So, naturally, they couldn't digest ordinary food."

I confess, I lost my temper. Robert crouched behind the bedside stand while I hurled crockery at his ears. "Do you mean," I shouted, "that all I can eat is invader meat—and the food they brought with them in their ship?"

"There's one possibility," he said, putting his head out. "I believe there were some seeds among the invaders' stores. If

we can plant those, and force them to maturity in time—"

"Get busy!" I told him, throwing the tray. "I'm hungry *now*!"

ON MANY an occasion, during the next month, I regretted the day I had ever seen the invaders from Venus. The foodstuffs found in their wrecked spaceship made meager rations for myself and the 34 other victims; moreover, they were mainly of such strange tastes and textures that not even our expert chefs could prepare them appetizingly. Meanwhile, in specially prepared plots (for which part of the mid-year quota had to be sacrificed), Robert's plantings of the alien seeds grew spindling and gray. Direct sunlight shriveled the first shoots; the rest had to be grown under blanching frames.

Disaster loomed ahead. I foresaw a miserable, starved death for myself and a disgraceful end for my patriarchate.

Twenty days after Robert's second setting of seedlings began to sprout, the wax-bean crop in the adjoining fields was harvested. After two more days, the inhabitants of MaGregor sectors B-11 and B-12 dropped at their work by the thousand. The infirmaries and hospitals of the district were overflowing by nightfall. The symptoms were familiar: cramps and nausea, fol-

lowed by coma. When the victims recovered, there were thousands more of us who could eat nothing but invader food—and more every day, every minute.

But one evil balanced another, for it was the bean crop, infected by Robert's seedlings, which had caused the "epidemic." The beans were now "alien" food—and so were the crops in all the surrounding fields, to an extent that grew to an unmanageable extent, even as we awoke to the danger.

For the first time, I saw the invasion for what it was. Sitting at another emergency synod, in the very chamber where the invaders had been condemned, I watched the half-hourly infection lines drawn in scarlet on the great illuminated map: first a tiny blot, then a spreading stain . . . wider and wider, until at last it engulfed more than a third of the continent.

"After all, what have we lost?" Sector Leader Abrams argued persuasively. "We haven't turned gray, as some alarmists predicted. The same infection that has transformed us, is now transforming our crops. A beet or a carrot tastes the same to us, is as nourishing as it was before. What do we care if the chemists tell us they're different? If *we* can't tell the difference—what difference *is* there?"

He sat down, smirking, to

some applause. I raised my hand.

"Can the Sector Leader tell me," I began, "how many trophy-taking raids have the Reds made on our territory during the past four weeks?"

Abrams stood up again. "Well, I haven't the exact number—"

"I have," I said. There had been one on Mar Vista Intersection, our neighbor to the north, only a week after I was taken ill: a 10-man rocket, swooping in over the Pacific, to make one stab-attack into the main residence cavern, load two dozen trophies onto their refrigerator truck, board the rocket again and escape. Then there had been light raids on small control stations in Murphy and West districts, three in all, and one more, an adolescent foray, in Market Center. A total of five. "And," I reminded Abrams, "all of these took place in the first two weeks since the invasion. In the two-week period just past, there have been *no* raids."

"That isn't unusual," he defended weakly. "Probably next week we'll see a heavy concentration of raids."

"Not this time," I said. "Evidently you have been too busy to notice that we haven't sent any raiders out, either—or that no raids are planned!"

"Why?" he asked, open-mouthed.

"Because," I pounced, "we can't eat Red meat! And they have found out that they can't eat ours. Those who did are undoubtedly starving to death—because there's no invader food over there, to contaminate the crops!"

Abrams sat down. There was a stunned silence throughout the chamber. After a few minutes, with nothing more said, I recessed the synod.

ONE possible solution remained. Diametrically opposed to all tradition, and of doubtful morality, it was nothing less than to *fly food to the enemy*. Such a step could not be taken on less than all-White authority, and I therefore requested a closed session of the great synod, in Central Intersection.

For three days and nights the question was debated, under the famous pierced ivory dome, while, as tradition demanded, no patriarch left his seat. At last, three weary patriarchs of the northwestern districts swung over to me, and the Chair himself cast the deciding vote in my favor.

Exhausted but victorious, I gathered my immediate family and chiefs of departments in the official viewing room, two nights later, to witness the experiment.

Seeds and small alien-infected pests had been loaded into spe-

cial breakaway compartments of two converted rockets, one aimed at Europe, one at Africa. Slave televisor rockets, following each at a quarter-mile distance, sent back their continuous records in coded pulses, translated at the receiver into vivid sight and sound.

Tensely we watched, in the split screen, as each missile roared toward the misty shore of its destination. One-half of the screen was lit with the first rosy glow of dawn, the other with the silvery sheen of moonlight.

Suddenly, catastrophe! First in the left-hand screen, then in the right, the seed missiles erupted into bright vermilion flame. They fell, blackened hulks, into the sea.

Our indignant messages to the high council of the Reds were answered with silence. Further attempts to land rockets on Red territory in the Eastern hemisphere met with the same fiery barrier. The Reds' unprecedented use of this illegal and immoral weapon—evidently one they had either preserved or resurrected from the previous civilization—meant only one thing.

They had ended communication with us, once for all, in a desperate move to save themselves from the alien chemistry.

"Pulphheads!" I raged, hurling an ashtray at the visor screen. If only they had let our rockets

land, everything could have been as before. But the Reds did not respond: Europe, Asia and Africa were dumb.

As for our colonies in that hemisphere, we had no news of them; the airwaves were dead. We could only suppose that the Reds were systematically slaughtering our cousins overseas, just as we were first infecting, then slaughtering the population of the Red colonies in the Americas. So matters went, and at the end of six months the Western hemisphere was totally White—the Eastern, we presumed, totally Red.

Time passed: eight months, ten, eleven. Marriages reached an unheard-of total that year; the baby crop followed. Housing grew catastrophically short almost overnight. The wave was mounting.

A YEAR to the day after the alien ship's landing, I was taking the air, as my custom was, in the fields of MaGregor sector B-11, near Belvil Intersection. The date was Sol 3, 2806; the time was approximately 14 hours. The fields in question were planted to cabbages; they had never been quite the same since the crash of the alien ship, and the cabbages were substandard.

I was musing on this subject when my eye was caught by a perceptibly moving object in the

west. Almost instantly, my step was arrested; I stared at the tiny glinting speck in apparently reasonless horror.

Curiously, it was the abortive movement of my arm as it strained to reach for the headknife I no longer carried, which triggered the recollection of the earlier occasion. The effect was startling: I felt with utter conviction that I had been carried back bodily in time.

So convincing was the illusion, that the obvious anomalies made no immediate impression upon me. The object, though radiant, was not so intolerably bright as it had been on that other occasion; nor was it approaching so rapidly.

Although I waited helplessly for the explosion that would hurl me to the ground, no explosion came. The glowing object seemed to hover in a wash of flame, and then lowered itself almost gently to the ground. The flame flickered and went out.

I blinked. The object—the spaceship—was lying on the ground amid rows of blackened plants. It was intact, not wrecked, the smooth hull even now dimming through red heat into the black.

As if in a daze, I descended and circled the hull at a cautious distance. It was unbroken and undamaged; the rows of port-holes gleamed through the heat-

shimmer; the rocket vents were bright-rimmed with heat. Nothing happened for a long time, except that the hull slowly cooled, with sharp crepitations, as I watched.

At length a segment of the hull turned frosty, cleared again, frosted, cleared, and so on rapidly until the hull remained dark and cool. I retreated several steps, but this time, the door did not fly off with a clatter; it opened, sedately, upon its hinges. A short stairway descended. After a moment several beings emerged from the opening.

I gazed almost without surprise as three man-shaped beings descended the stairway to stand before me. They were neither gray, nor goat-eyed, nor six-fingered, but to all appearance, save for their strange dress, men like myself.

Still bemused, I saw the first alien stop squarely before me and heard him address me by name. His accent was so strange that at first I could not understand him, but he spoke our language, not the spitting talk of the gray men. At length I made out that he was inviting me to go aboard the spaceship for a discussion. I at once refused, with vigor. The aliens, not seeming surprised, then took little folding seats from the tubular kits they carried at their backs, and politely offered me

one. I sat down gingerly in the thing, which bore my weight, though with unpleasant flexibility; and the aliens arranged themselves in a quarter-circle around me.

The leader leaned forward to engage my attention. "We have come to make terms," he said earnestly, pronouncing each word with exaggerated care.

"Terms?" I inquired uncomprehendingly.

"To make peace. Understand? We sent the gray men. They are native inhabitants of Venus, whom we train to be our servants. We knew what would happen. It was all done with a purpose. You understand?"

I did, but not what the purpose could be. "Why?" I asked him.

The spokesman said, "We are the descendants of the original Earth colony on Venus. When civilization collapsed at the end of the twenty-second century, our ancestors were left on their own. With only the help of the greasies—the gray men—they fought a harsh world and won. But when we thought of making contact again with our mother planet, and built devices for that purpose, we were horrified to discover to what depths our cousins had sunk."

I requested that he repeat this last sentence. When he had done so several times, I could make no

more sense of it than before, and said as much.

"I refer," he explained finally, with a show of impatience, "to your hideous custom of eating each other."

I rose and attempted to strike the alien, and would have succeeded if not for the rickety chair-thing, which swayed under me and interfered with my balance. The two inferior aliens quickly leapt up and seized my arms, holding me without violence until the leader had recovered to some extent from his amazement.

"Why did you do that?" he asked.

I told him, with some heat, that although an old man, I would not stand idle to let him insult me. If he had come all the way to Earth under that impression, I said, I thought he was a fool as well as an unclean outsider. I added several remarks of the same general kind.

The three conferred, obviously impressed by my vehemence, but seemingly puzzled. At last the leader's face cleared, and he turned to me again: "Pardon me—an error of speech. I meant to say, your hideous custom of eating the *Reds*. And, of course, theirs of eating you."

I sat down again, more confused than before. "What is hideous about that?" I demanded irritably.

ON THIS POINT he was obviously irrational; the more he attempted to explain it to me, the more red-faced and the less coherent he became. At last, it being evident that an impasse had been reached, he made an effort to control himself, and brought up the next point.

"Your land is becoming overcrowded," he said. "Your people are hungry."

I admitted it; who could deny?

"You can no longer reduce your population, nor keep up your food supply, by the methods you formerly used."

This was also correct, and I said so.

"Then you must adopt some other means of limiting your population."

It was only half the problem, but I agreed. "Unless," I said, "your people return to this world in sufficient numbers to begin trophy-taking on a large scale immediately—"

He became red-faced again, and declared in unnecessarily violent language that what I proposed would never take place. I also lost my temper, and expressed myself in these terms: "You sons of this and that have destroyed our way of life! We are starving to death because of you! You say we cannot take trophies from the *Reds*, or from you, and only a this, that, and the other would expect us to raid

among ourselves! *So what do you want us to do?*"

In a moment he became calmer. I endeavored to follow his example, although my knife arm was twitching in a distracting manner.

"We want," he said, again speaking slowly and clearly, as if to a child, "for you to adopt another means of limiting your numbers. One that does not involve what you call trophy-taking."

"We have been driven to this conclusion already," I told him with bitter contempt. I saw now that he was adamant as well as irrational, and would be of no use to us at all.

He seemed to brighten. "This is sooner than we had expected," he said. "Why did you not say so before? When was this decision reached?"

"Yesterday, at the great synod," I told him gloomily. I had voted for the new measure myself, necessarily. It was the only alternative which fulfilled the two essential requirements—reducing the population, and providing nourishment—but it was without pleasure that I looked forward to it. Where were the good old days with their heart-warming glamor and excitement? Gone.

"Then," he prompted me, "you will soon begin the prevention of conception?"

As soon as I understood what was meant, I overturned the chair again in my anger. I was shaking with outrage to such a degree that I could not speak. Although I had no headknife, the chair sufficed. With vigorous sweeps of it I forced the three aliens to retreat toward their ship, protesting volubly as they went.

They were on the stairway before I could trust myself to speak. The leader was bleeding from a large bruise on his cheekbone, and looked dazed or stunned. "What did I say that time?" he asked plaintively.

"You proposed an unthinkable immorality," I said. "Get out of my sight—go back where you came from—it makes me ill to look at you."

The leader looked ill, himself. "Violence between humans," he breathed weakly, and retreated into the opening after the two inferiors. The portal partially closed, then opened again. The leader's head appeared.

"But what shall I tell them at home?" he insisted. "You say you've given up trophy-taking—and yet you won't practice—" He left the sentence unfinished, as I lifted the chair threateningly. "Well, then, what will you do?"

I drew myself up scornfully. I was thinking with satisfaction of my seventh grandson, who

had just passed his clan initiation: he, at least, was now officially a White, and so was safe. It was sad enough to think that my numerous pre-nubile granddaughters could not be considered members of the community at all, as our religion holds unmarried women to have no souls . . . At any rate, young meat was tasty.

"I doubt," I said icily, "if I

could ever make you understand."

The door closed. After a time, the ship jacked itself upright on extensible legs. Flame spouted from its tail; it rose on a bright column and dwindled rapidly in the sky. The noise of its passing echoed and died; the vapor trail drifted slowly away. Then the world was whole and peaceful once more.

∞ ∞ ∞

The Silver Corridor

(Continued from page 64).

Alone. Staring at each other with dawning comprehension, dawning belief.

THEY both realized it at the same moment. They both had the conviction of their cause, yet they both knew the woman-thing had been right.

"Krane," said Marmorth, starting toward the black-bearded man, "she's right, you know. Perhaps we can get together and figure . . ."

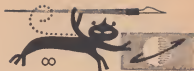
The other had started toward the older man as he had spoken.

"Yes, perhaps there's something in what you say. Perhaps there's a . . ."

At the instant they both realized it—the instant each considered the other's viewpoint—the illusion barriers shattered, of course, and the red-hot lava poured in on them, engulfing both men completely in a blistering inferno.

∞ ∞ ∞

Feedback



THIS department is strictly for the readers. Ideas about science fiction in general are as welcome as discussions of INFINITY itself. Keep the letters coming to the Editor, c/o Royal Publications, 47 E. 44th St., New York 17, N.Y.

∞

In reply to Allan Steiger's remarks on the flaccid (plasmo-lytic?) nature of recent modern s-f (what has Korzybski to say about that?)

1. There isn't any lack of imagination, only a branching from the principle.

In armament there has been no appreciable change from the projectile type that livened up the siege of Kaifeng, way back when. Armament is at a standstill!

2. Is Mr. Steiger forezooming to set limitations on the latitude enjoyed by s-f writers? Since when has sociology become verboten in science fiction?—not lately, it seems. Racial discrimination is a social phenomenon.

3. Relativity isn't the foundation-type thing Mr. Steiger sup-

poses it to be. Einstein's general and special theories are completely different-axiomatic? Mr. Fred Hoyle has been doing some fancy fence-hopping in his Velikovskian theories, and the difference is obvious. An interstellar de-Gaussing coil system is plenty original (Korzybski be damned), but it seems just a little fantastic.

4. If astronomers are generally in agreement that Venusian clouds are hydrocarbon vapors without water and oxygen they must have methods of detection not yet revealed to the public, because nothing below the clouds can be probed by the spectroscope. Above the clouds water vapor would be crystallized and the spectroscope picks up water vapor, not ice crystals. Oxygen would be in the form of individual atoms, not molecules, due to the solar radiation. I don't think they'd show up in the same place on the spectrogram as would molecules.—Donald Dixon, 215 Elm St., New Britain, Conn.

∞

(Subj.: Letter pub. in "Feed-back," June issue INFINITY.

Ans.: d) cartoonists.—Allan Paul Steiger, 4684 Landchester Rd., Cleveland 9, Ohio.

(*Ques.: Political or comic?*
—ED.)

∞

Many years ago, when science fiction was in its infancy, and if someone caught you reading it you were considered a nut, I was an avid fan.

Passing the newsstand of the local Post Exchange I came across the cover of your mag. Yes, I am one of those. But, it wasn't the cover that interested me, it was the name INFINITY.

I once belonged to a science fiction club and got a feeling to return again to the fold. I became acquainted with a number of nice people through these magazines and would like to continue to hear from them.

A good reader's page always seems to sell the magazine. I'm all for a trading post. The more such features appear, the more interest you will get from the fans.

I have only read a few stories before writing this letter. Your stories have just the right amount of humor to give interest and to keep them from becoming downright dull.

Am particularly interested in coming in contact with a science-

fiction club and again becoming active in it.

Will particularly love to hear from anyone who has a restless pen or a typewriter. I'm not lazy when it comes to answering letters.

So, let's have it.—Michael J. Pelsang, Pfc. RA42156049, 1st Signal Co., 1st Inf. Div., Ft. Riley, Kans.

∞

Allan Paul Steiger, in "Feed-back," contradicts himself in more than one place, and I hate to see such muddled statements go unchallenged.

I don't wish to appear stupid, for I like to think of myself as a fairly avid s-f fan, but I can't see where and when racial tolerance has dominated science fiction. To refresh my memory, I sorted through my personal collection of *Astounding*, *Galaxy*, and similar s-f magazines which were printed in the past year or two (since that is the period which Mr. Steiger mentions), and could only find three or four stories with a definite racial theme behind them. Even if there were some that I missed, the total couldn't reach more than a dozen or two, and I hardly call this a deluge. Perhaps Mr. Steiger has been reading some magazines I haven't heard of?

The argument against the use

of a space-warp by science-fiction authors is one that has me completely baffled. Mr. Steiger condemns the use of such a means as subspace drive (which would entail the fourth dimension) to carry protagonists to the stars on the grounds that it "is a violation of . . . all . . . science has learned about our universe since the turn of the century." But then he proposes what is, to my mind, an equally ridiculous device for holding "the rocket together in passing through the light-speed barrier." Certainly a gadget such as this has no more contemporary scientific foundations than the system of hyperspace, so what difference is there in which system it is used, eh? Until the speed of light is reached, anything is possible, and to restrict the use of a space-warp is to confine the "imagination" which you insist must be allowed to roam.

The same thing applies to Venus as a water-laden world. Mr. Steiger notes that "astronomers are generally in agreement that those clouds (the ones surrounding our sister planet) are hydrocarbon vapors, containing no oxygen and no water whatsoever." Astronomers are generally in agreement! Phooey, says I; until there is enough irrevocable proof to cause unanimous reac-

tion, or until the first spaceship spans the gap between Earth and Venus, anything goes!

In reply to your "R.S.V.P." editorial, I will say this: INFINITY needs a "swap column" like a cow needs wings. John Courtois and any others who may have suggested such a department to you are only looking for a place to sell their books and mags without having to pay for the ad.

I would like to see a theme issue occasionally, but certainly no oftener than once a year. But if you can't do it without losing the wonderful balance that has prevailed throughout the first three issues, don't try to do it.

One writer I would like to see again is Doc Smith. I heard somewhere that he had consented to write for INFINITY, and the recent news is that he will be writing full time in another year, the first effort being a new Kimball Kinnison novel.

If you could secure serial rights for INFINITY, here is one who would be most appreciative. —Kent Moomaw, 4722 Peabody Ave., Cincinnati 27, Ohio.

(What's much more likely than the return of the Lensman is a series of short novels featuring an entirely new group of characters. Nothing definite yet, but there's a high probability. —ED.)

∞ ∞ ∞

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